

From the award-winning creator of

AMERICAN SPLENDOR

Harvey Pekar

EGO & HUBRIS

THE MICHAEL MALICE STORY

MICHAEL MALICE
IS A PIECE OF WORK!



G. Dumm 2K6



BALLANTINE
BOOKS

Harvey Pekar

EGO & HUBRIS

**"Michael Malice is one of the
most puzzling twenty-first-century
Americans I have ever met."**

—HARVEY PEKAR

Who's Michael Malice, and how did he become the subject of a graphic novel by Harvey Pekar, the curmudgeon from Cleveland?

First of all, Michael Malice is a real person. He's 5'6" and weighs 130 pounds. Although on the cusp of thirty, he could easily pass for a scrawny teenager.

One day Michael, a guy with a patchwork employment record and dreams as big as his ego, meets Harvey and begins to relay all these wild stories about his life. Simple as that. Harvey thinks the guy is bright but a bit of a riddle—though not the kind wrapped in an enigma. It's strange. He seems like the type of person you meet every day, rather ordinary, until you really get to know him. Then you realize he's exceptional, unusual, and contradictory. Pleasant one minute, really nasty the next. But isn't cruelty part of human nature? We digress. . . .

Harvey writes up and illustrates one of Michael Malice's tales, "Fish Story," which is part of *American Splendor: Our Movie Year*. It makes a splash and spawns this book, Harvey's first full-length hardcover, a graphic novel event about one guy's life.

Ego & Hubris relates how, a year and a half after his birth in the Ukraine, Michael Malice moves with his parents to Brooklyn. He's an intransigent kid, a hard-ass—both a demon to and demonized by the people who cross his path. His life is a constant struggle for

validation in a world where the machine keeps trying to break him down. But Michael has a way with people . . . or rather, has a way of getting even with people. Hey, if you can't live up to your parents' expectations, at least you can live up to your name.

Michael has never come close to fulfilling his huge dreams—until now. And just as Harvey's been the everyman for a certain generation of graphic-novel readers, Michael Malice will be the everyman for a new generation.

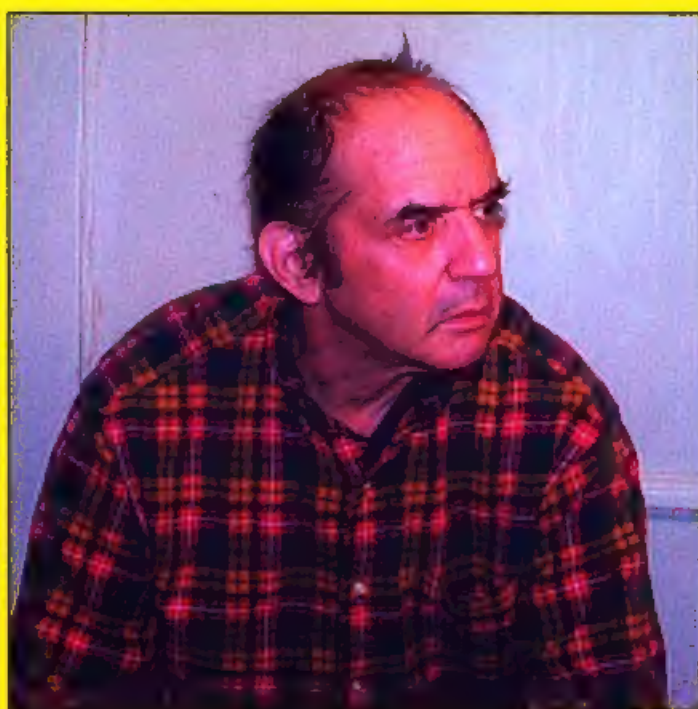


PHOTO: © GARY DUMM

HARVEY PEKAR, a native of Cleveland, is best known for his autobiographical slice-of-life comic book series *American Splendor*, a first-person account of his down-trodden life, which was made into a movie starring Paul Giamatti. He is also the author of *Best of American Splendor* and *American Splendor: Our Movie Year*. He is an omnivorous reader, an obsessive-compulsive collector, and a jazz critic whose reviews have been published in the *Boston Herald*, *The Austin Chronicle*, and *Jazz Times*. He has done freelance work for the critically acclaimed radio station WKSU and has appeared eight times on *Late Night with David Letterman* and two times on *The Late Show with David Letterman*.

Jacket illustration: © Gary Dumm
Jacket design: Derek Walls

www.ballantinebooks.com

Ballantine Books
New York, N.Y.
© 2006 by Random House, Inc.

Praise for
Harvey Pekar
and

AMERICAN SPLENDOR

"Pekar lets all of life flood into his panels:
the humdrum and the heroic, the gritty and the grand."

—*The New York Times Book Review*

"[Pekar] has a vision that makes daily city life—a ride on the bus,
a run-in with a boss, or simply buying bread—dramatic."

—*Chicago Sun-Times*

"Simply stated, *American Splendor* is the most superb literary
endeavor to come off the streets of Cleveland in decades."

—*Cleveland Plain Dealer*



EGO & HUBRIS

Also by Harvey Pekar

(published by Ballantine Books)

American Splendor

Our Movie Year

Best of American Splendor

AMERICAN **SPLENDOR**

EGO & HUBRIS

THE MICHAEL MALICE STORY

STORY BY

HARVEY PEKAR

ART BY

GARY DUMM

*To Cliff,
Harvey Pekar*



BALLANTINE BOOKS NEW YORK

Ego & Hubris is a work of nonfiction.
Some names and identifying details have been changed.

Copyright © 2006 by Harvey Pekar LLC.

All rights reserved.

Published in the United States by Ballantine Books,
an imprint of The Random House Publishing Group,
a division of Random House, Inc., New York.

BALLANTINE and colophon are registered trademarks
of Random House, Inc.

ISBN 0-345-47939-4

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper

www.ballantinebooks.com

2 4 6 8 9 7 5 3 1

First Edition

EGO & HUBRIS

AMERICAN SPLENDOR

PRESENTS:

EGO & HUBRIS

THE **MICHAEL MALICE STORY**

STORY BY HARVEY PEKAR • ART BY GARY DUMM



I WAS RAISED THE ONLY CHILD OF ONLY CHILDREN. MY MOTHER HAD LITTLE CONTACT WITH HER MOTHER AFTER WE MOVED TO BROOKLYN FROM THE UKRAINE (IT WAS RUSSIA THEN). SHE HADN'T SEEN HER FATHER, A VIOLENT DRUNK, SINCE SHE WAS A LITTLE GIRL.



MY FATHER'S PARENTS CAME HERE SOON AFTER WE DID, THE LATE SEVENTIES. I REMEMBER MY PARENTS TELLING ME THAT I HAD TO BE NICE TO MY GRANDPARENTS WHEN I SAW THEM. I COULDN'T UNDERSTAND WHY THESE STRANGERS WERE MAKING A BIG FUSS OVER ME WHEN WE WENT OUT TO MEET THEM, LIKE THEY KNEW ME OR SOMETHING.

MY GRANDFATHER WAS AN OLD ARMY MAN. HE USED TO TELL STORIES ABOUT BEING STATIONED IN KAMCHATKA IN WWII. THERE WAS LITTLE FOOD SO THEY KILLED AND ATE SEALS. THE FATTY MEAT GAVE THEM DIARRHEA, SO THEY BALANCED THAT OUT WITH CONSTIPATING BERRIES. AFTER THE WAR HE WAS AN AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLER FOR MANY YEARS. MY GRANDMOTHER WAS A HOUSEWIFE.



MY GRANDFATHER'S BROTHERS WERE BOTH DEAD. ONE HAD BEEN AN OLYMPIC WEIGHTLIFTER. MY GRANDMOTHER HAD A YOUNGER BROTHER WHO MOVED TO SAN FRANCISCO WITH HER MOTHER. MY GREAT GRANDMOTHER LIVED INTO HER 90S AND NEVER LOST HER MIND. SHE DIED ONLY A FEW YEARS AGO...SO THE FAMILY WAS ME, MY PARENTS AND MY PATERNAL GRANDPARENTS.

My
GRANDMOTHER
TOOK CARE OF ME
WHILE MY PARENTS
WORKED. MY
FATHER WAS A
MESSENGER AND
WENT TO BARUCH
COLLEGE
TO STUDY
COMPUTERS. HE
LATER WORKED
FOR MERRILL
LYNCH. HE
TAUGHT WHAT
HE KNEW TO MY
MOTHER AND
GOT HER TO DO
COMPUTER
WORK.



My GRAND-
MOTHER ALWAYS
COOKED THE SAME
THINGS FOR ME:
FRIED CHICKEN
CUTLETS, STUFFED
PEPPERS, BEEF
FLAVORED RICE,
KASHE, BORSCHT,
CAVIAR SAND-
WICHES, FILET OF
SOLE OR CHICKEN
NOODLE SOUP. I
WAS AN EXTREME-
LY PICKY KID AND
WAS LITERALLY
NEVER HUNGRY.
THE FIRST TIME
IN MY LIFE THAT I
EVER FELT HUN-
GRY WAS WHEN I
WAS EIGHTEEN.



When I WAS A BABY
THEY USED TO CALL ME
"BUCHENWALD", BECAUSE I
WAS SO SKINNY.



I USED TO HAVE
STOMACHACHES
ALL THE TIME.
I WAS SHIPPED
FROM DOCTOR TO
DOCTOR. THEY
ALWAYS SAID I
HAD A NERVOUS
STOMACH. I WAS
ALSO LACTOSE
INTOLERANT.
UNKNOWNLY, DAD
FORCED ME TO
HAVE A BOWL OF
CEREAL EVERY
MORNING. MOM
WOULD GIVE ME
YOGURT AT NIGHT.
I WAS ALWAYS
THE SHORTEST KID
IN SCHOOL, AND
THEY WANTED TO
MAKE SURE I HAD
ENOUGH CALCIUM.

I GREW UP IN BENSONHURST, WHICH WAS A MAFIA NEIGHBORHOOD WHEN I WAS A KID. I MOVED BACK AFTER COLLEGE AND LIVED THERE FOR 7 YEARS. ANYWAY, THE MAFIA KEPT IT VERY SAFE.



FOR NURSERY SCHOOL I WENT TO THE LOCAL JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER. I COULDN'T SPEAK ENGLISH THAT WELL, AND I WAS PRETTY NERVOUS. I REMEMBER THE FIRST DAY, THE TEACHER TOLD US TO GATHER ROUND SO SHE COULD READ US A STORY. I PULLED UP A CHAIR AND WATCHED IN HORROR AS THE KIDS ALL SAT DOWN ON THE FLOOR. THE IDEA THAT A HUMAN BEING WOULD SIT ON THE FLOOR WAS COMPLETELY FOREIGN TO ME.



I WAS A BRILLIANT KID. PEOPLE THINK THAT IT'S BRAGGING TO SAY YOU'RE BRILLIANT. BUT IF I WERE THE TALLEST KID, IT WOULD BE REGARDED AS A MERE STATEMENT OF FACT. SO I'M NOT SURE WHY IT'S REGARDED AS ARROGANCE WHEN I SAY I WAS SMARTER THAN EVERYONE. MAYBE BECAUSE SO MANY PEOPLE THINK THEY'RE SMART WHEN THEY'RE NOT.

I HAVE A 160 I.Q., WHICH IS FOUR STANDARD DEVIATIONS ABOVE THE MEAN (OR A HIGHER I.Q. THAN 99.997% OF THE POPULATION), WHICH MEANS THAT THERE ARE 240 PEOPLE WHO ARE SMARTER THAN ME IN NEW YORK CITY. I JUST DID THE CALCULATION, AND I'M PRETTY WEIRDED OUT BY IT.

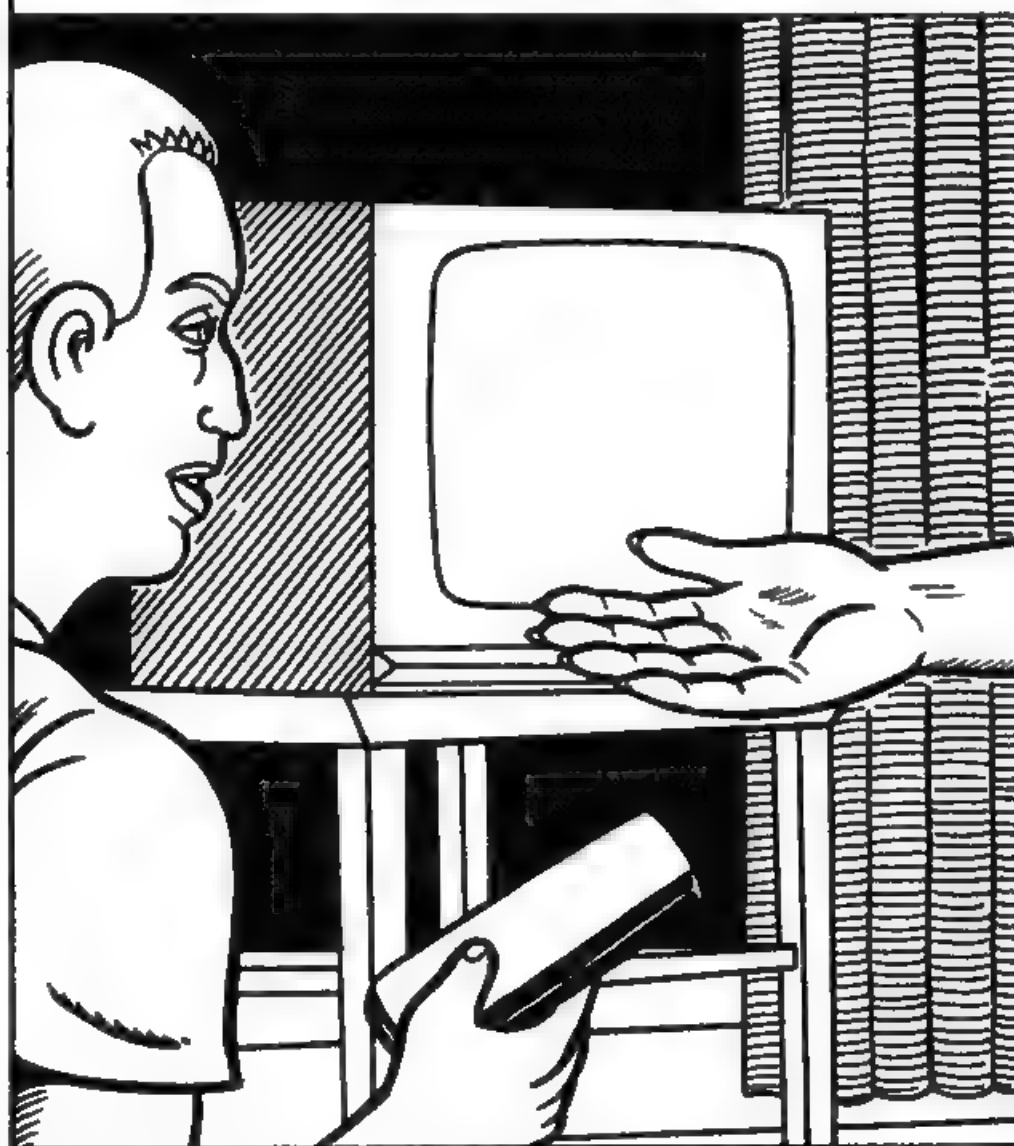


MY DAD IS VERY, VERY SMART IN CERTAIN WAYS. I WAS TELLING SOMEONE THIS ONCE AND TO PROVE IT I CALLED MY DAD UP AND ASKED HIM THE HISTORY OF THE NETHERLANDS. HE LAUNCHED RIGHT INTO IT.

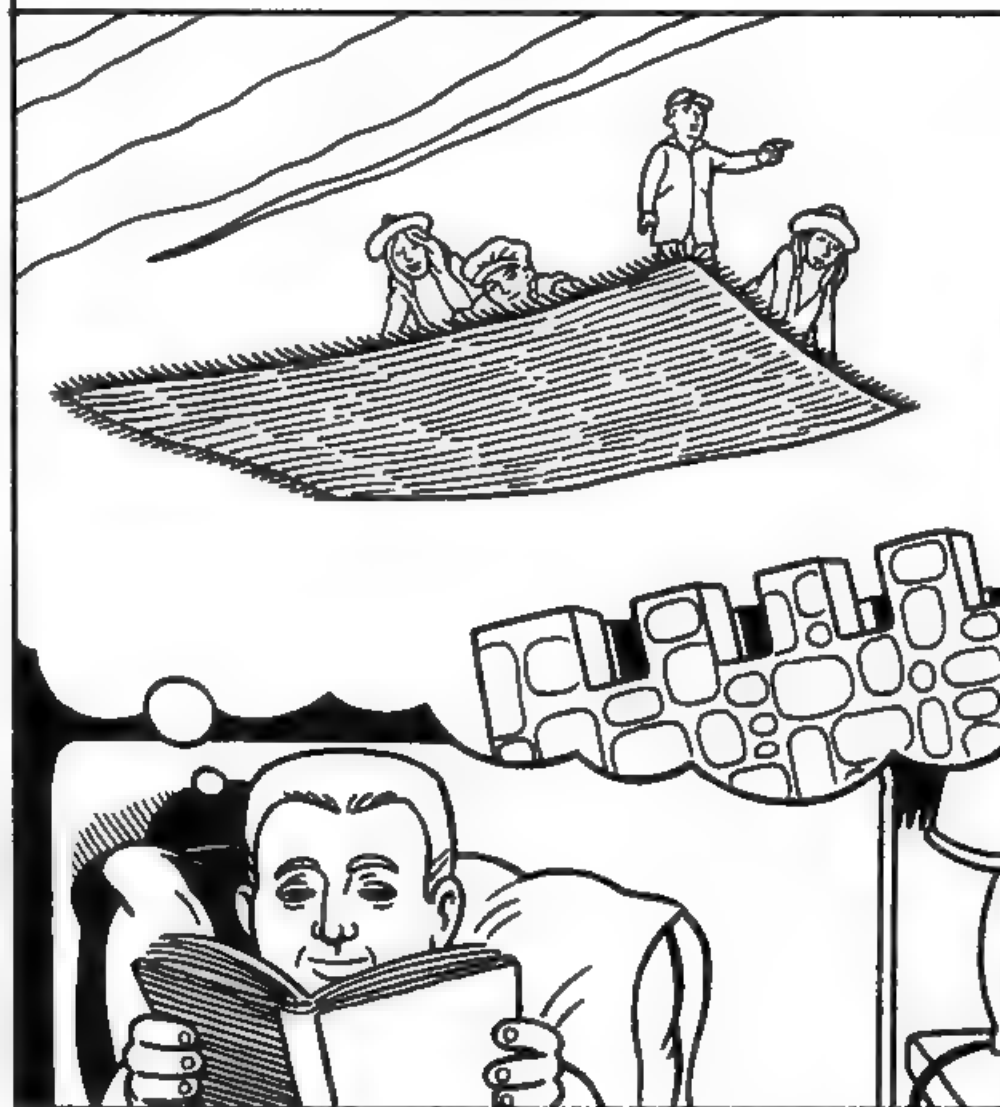


MY MOM IS PRETTY DUMB, BUT SHE WAS VERY BEAUTIFUL. ALL MY LIFE MY FRIENDS WOULD TELL ME HOW PRETTY SHE WAS.

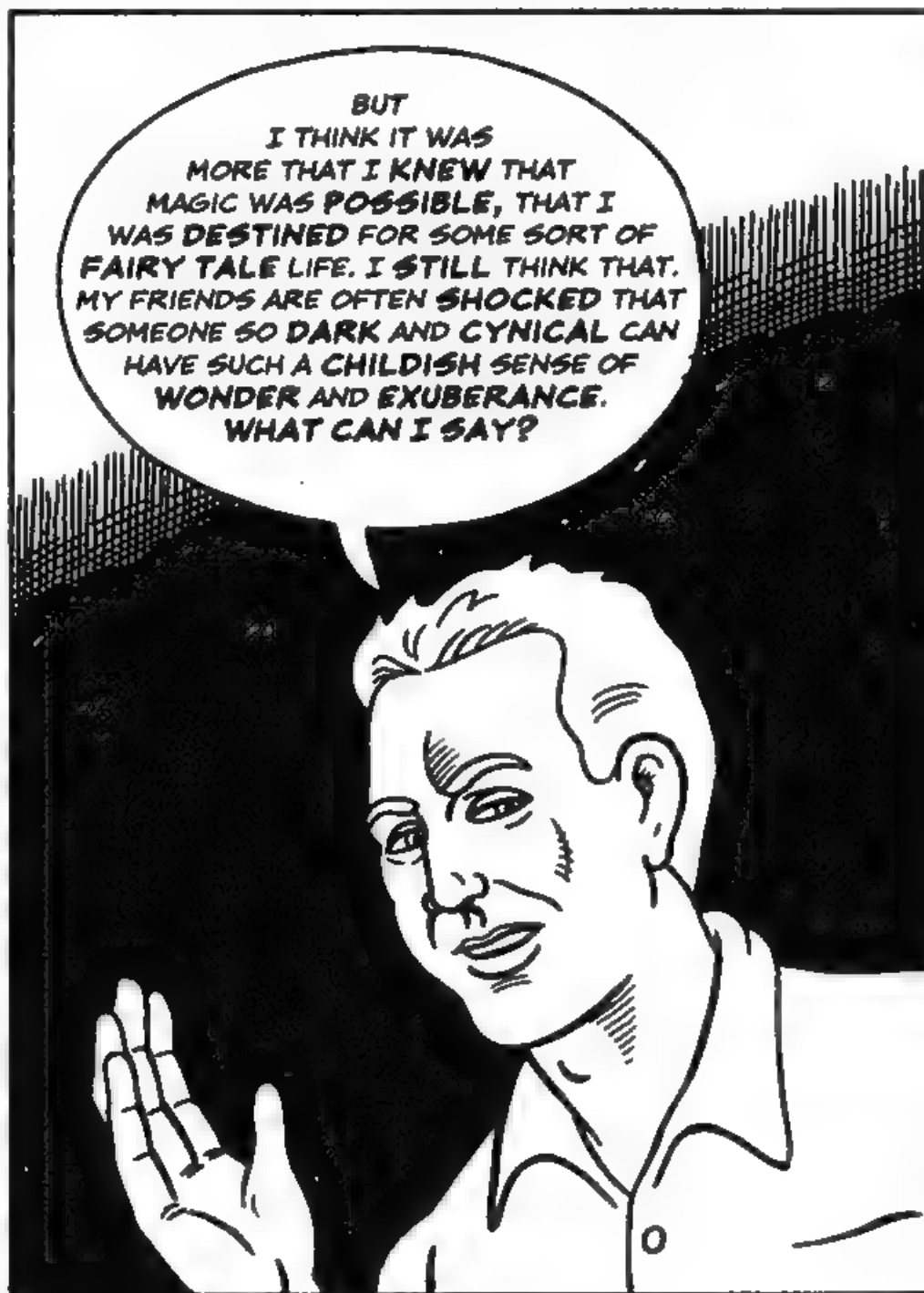
I GREW UP COMPLETELY ALONE. NO FRIENDS AT ALL. MY PARENTS WOULD MAKE ME THEIR LITTLE SERVANT, ANSWER THE PHONE, EVEN THOUGH IT WAS NEVER FOR ME. OR MY MOM WOULD CALL ME INTO THE BEDROOM TO GET HER THE REMOTE FOR THE TV.



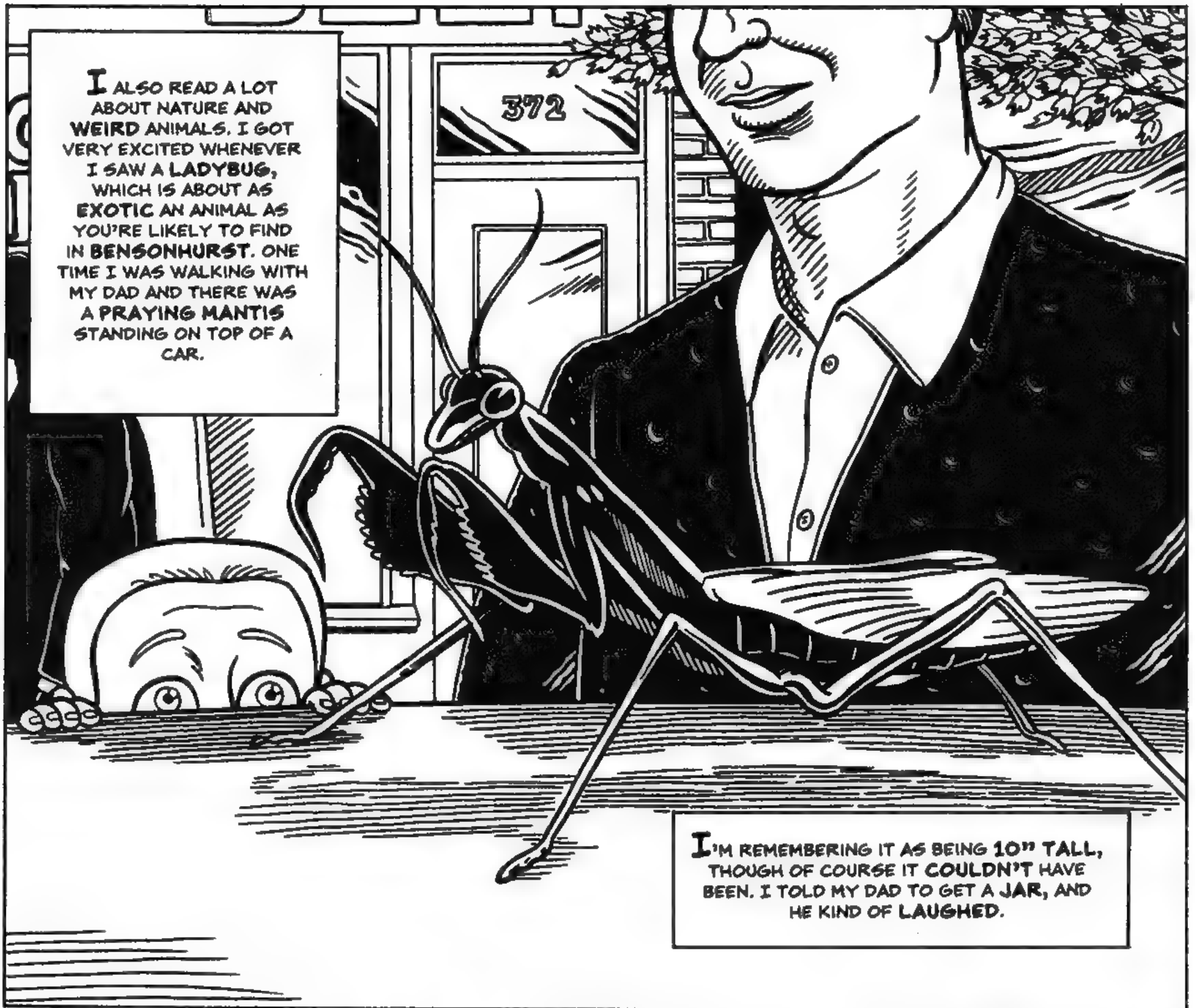
I SPENT A LOT OF TIME READING AS A KID. MY FAVORITE BOOKS WERE ONES ABOUT CHILDREN WHO FIND SOME DOORWAY INTO A MAGICAL KINGDOM, BY E. NESBIT, EDWARD EAGER, C.S. LEWIS, THE OZ SERIES. I THINK IT'S TOO EASY TO READ SOMETHING INTO THIS, THAT THIS WAS MY WAY OF ESCAPING.



BUT I THINK IT WAS MORE THAT I KNEW THAT MAGIC WAS POSSIBLE, THAT I WAS DESTINED FOR SOME SORT OF FAIRY TALE LIFE. I STILL THINK THAT. MY FRIENDS ARE OFTEN SHOCKED THAT SOMEONE SO DARK AND CYNICAL CAN HAVE SUCH A CHILDISH SENSE OF WONDER AND EXUBERANCE. WHAT CAN I SAY?



I ALSO READ A LOT ABOUT NATURE AND WEIRD ANIMALS. I GOT VERY EXCITED WHENEVER I SAW A LADYBUG, WHICH IS ABOUT AS EXOTIC AN ANIMAL AS YOU'RE LIKELY TO FIND IN BENSONHURST. ONE TIME I WAS WALKING WITH MY DAD AND THERE WAS A PRAYING MANTIS STANDING ON TOP OF A CAR.



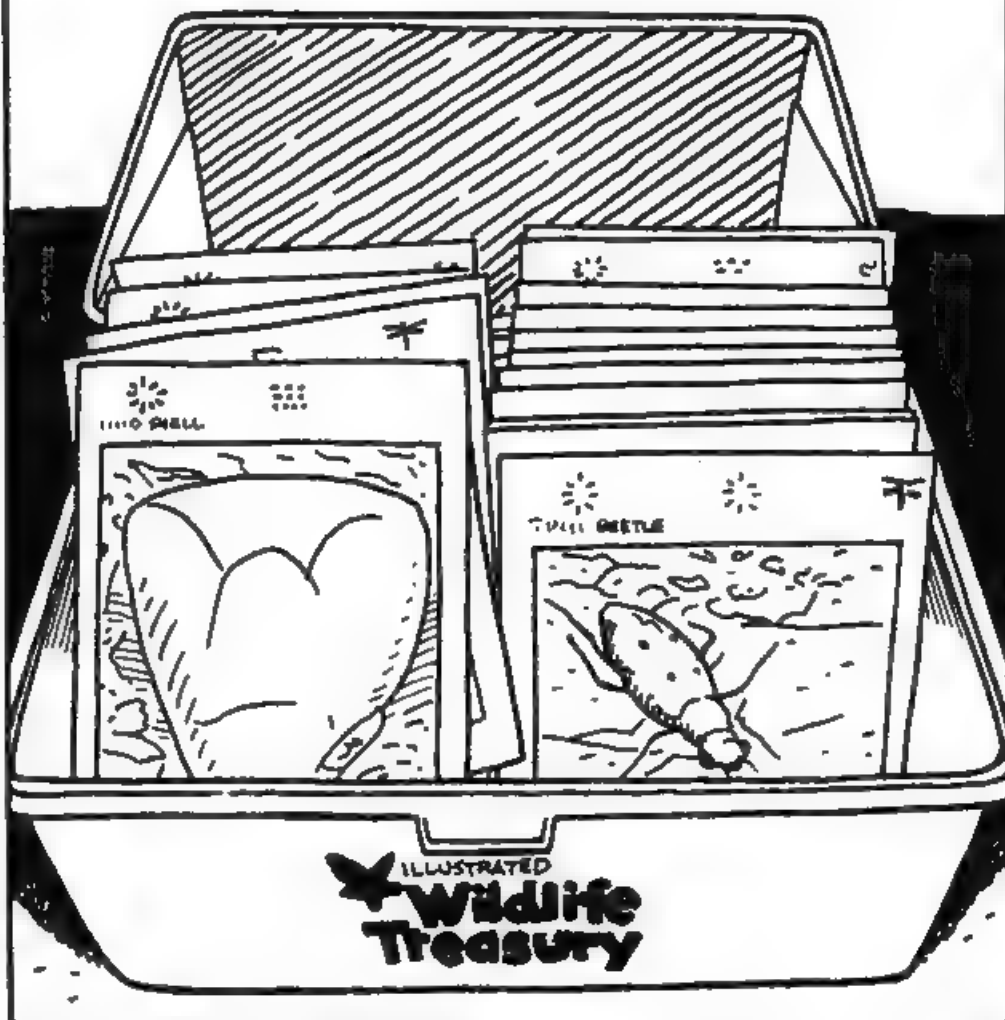
I'M REMEMBERING IT AS BEING 10" TALL, THOUGH OF COURSE IT COULDN'T HAVE BEEN. I TOLD MY DAD TO GET A JAR, AND HE KIND OF LAUGHED.

IT FLEW AWAY AFTER A COUPLE OF MINUTES.

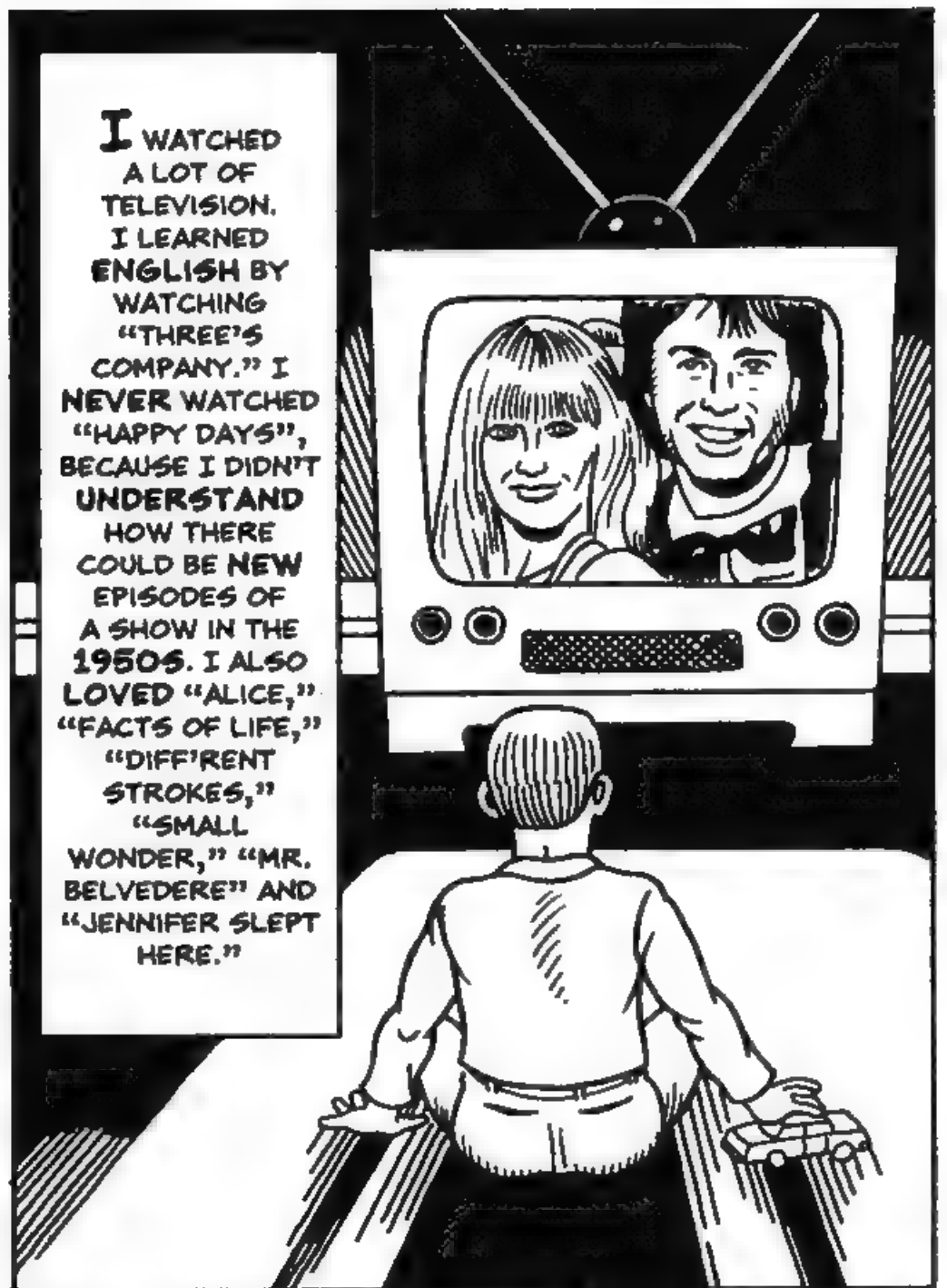


I'M NOT SURE WHY I WAS SO MOVED BY THE EXPERIENCE. I SUSPECT IT WOULD BE LIKE SEEING TINKERBELLE FOR A NORMAL KID.

I ALSO HAD THESE SAFARI CARDS, LIKE BASEBALL CARDS BUT WITH A DIFFERENT ANIMAL ON EACH ONE. I WOULD SPEND HOURS REARRANGING THE CARDS BY SCIENTIFIC ORDER (MAMMALS, REPTILES, ETC.), THEN I'D REDO THE WHOLE PILE ALPHABETICALLY.



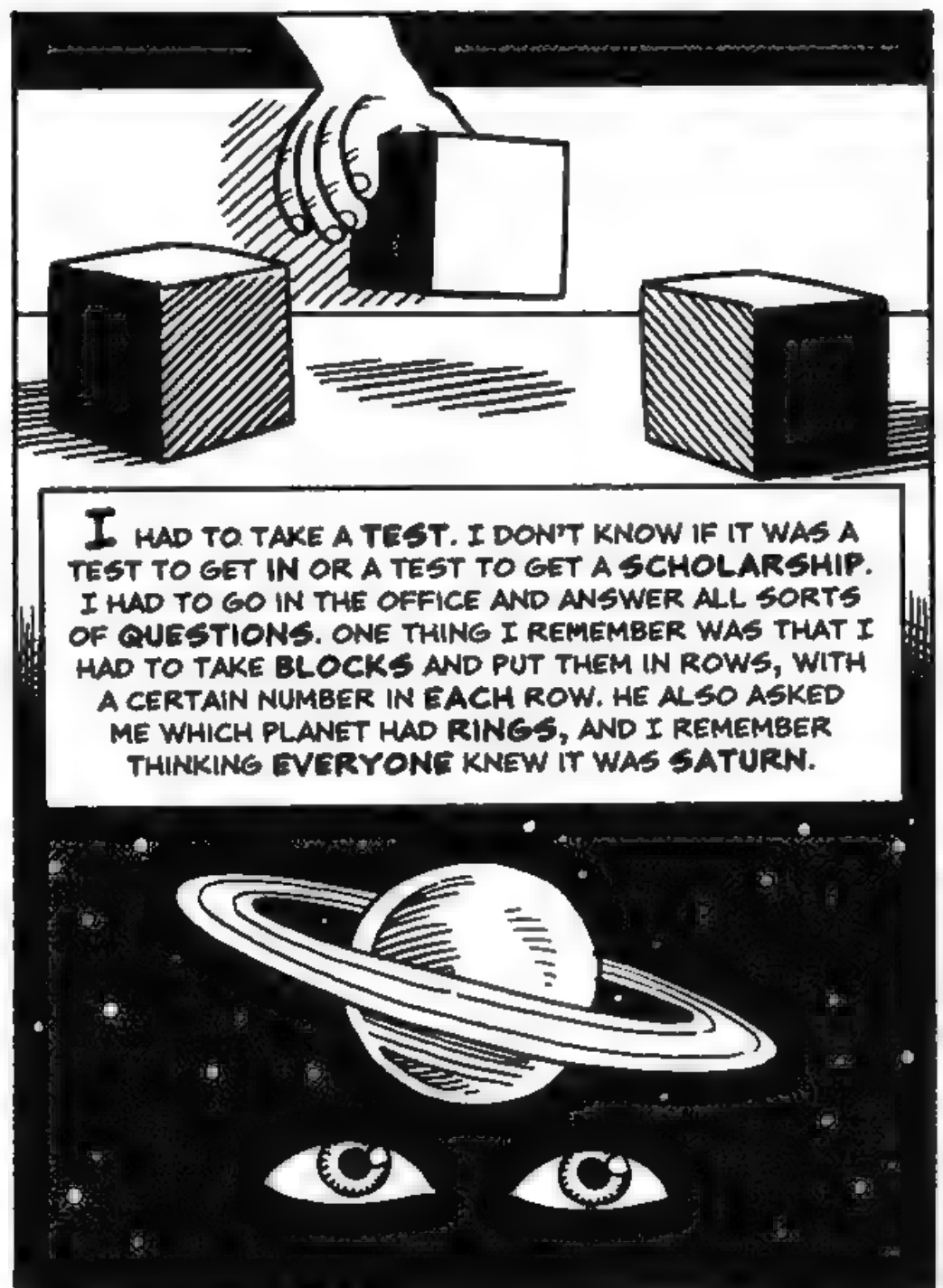
I WATCHED A LOT OF TELEVISION. I LEARNED ENGLISH BY WATCHING "THREE'S COMPANY." I NEVER WATCHED "HAPPY DAYS", BECAUSE I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND HOW THERE COULD BE NEW EPISODES OF A SHOW IN THE 1950S. I ALSO LOVED "ALICE," "FACTS OF LIFE," "DIFF'RENT STROKES," "SMALL WONDER," "MR. BELVEDERE" AND "JENNIFER SLEPT HERE."

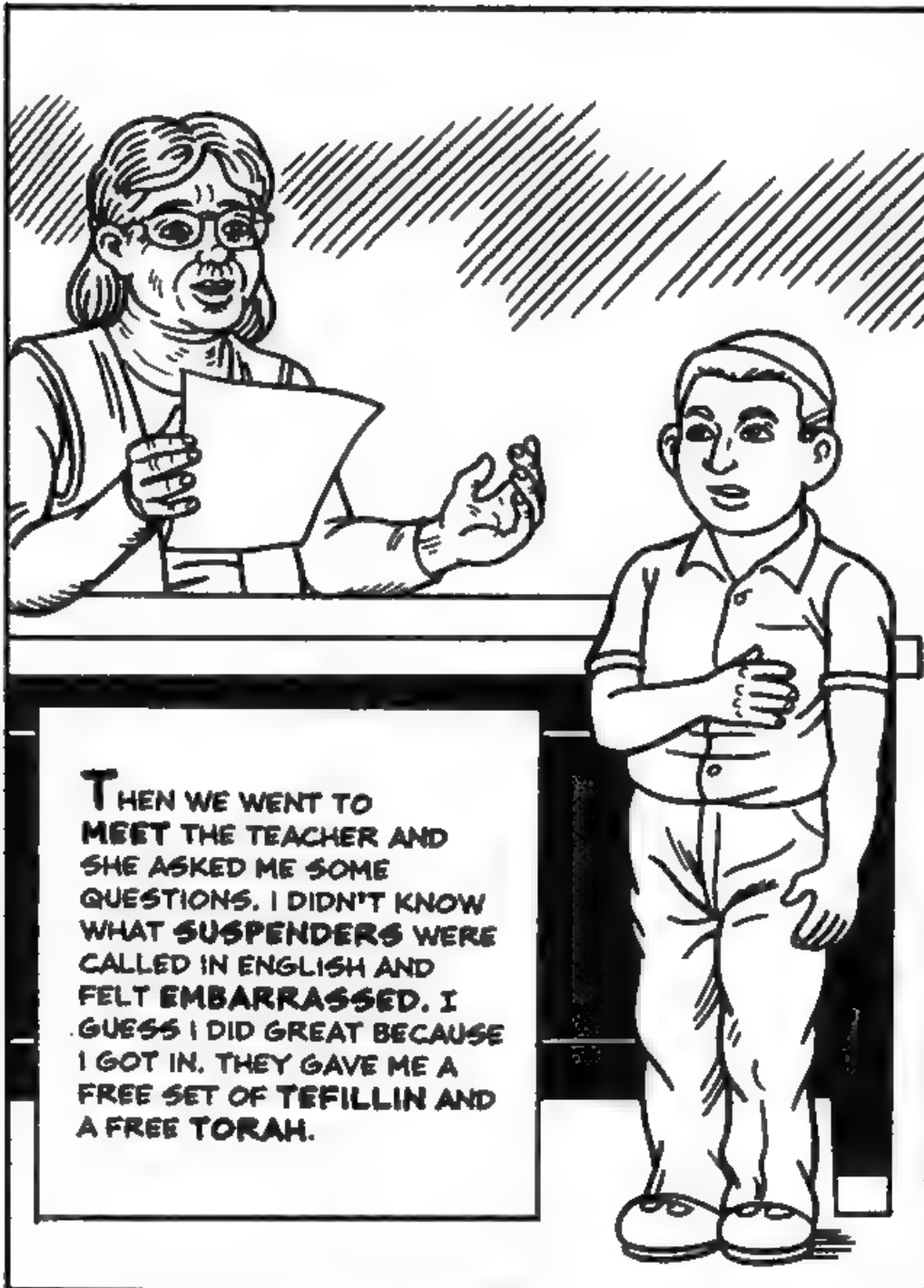


ANYWAY, MY DAD DECIDED THAT I WAS GOING TO GO TO YESHIVAH OF FLATBUSH FOR SCHOOL, WHICH WAS ORTHODOX JEWISH. I THINK THEY GAVE SCHOLARSHIPS TO POOR JEWISH KIDS, AND WE WERE REALLY POOR. MY DAD WOULD STEAL GUM FOR ME FROM WALDBAUM'S ALL THE TIME.

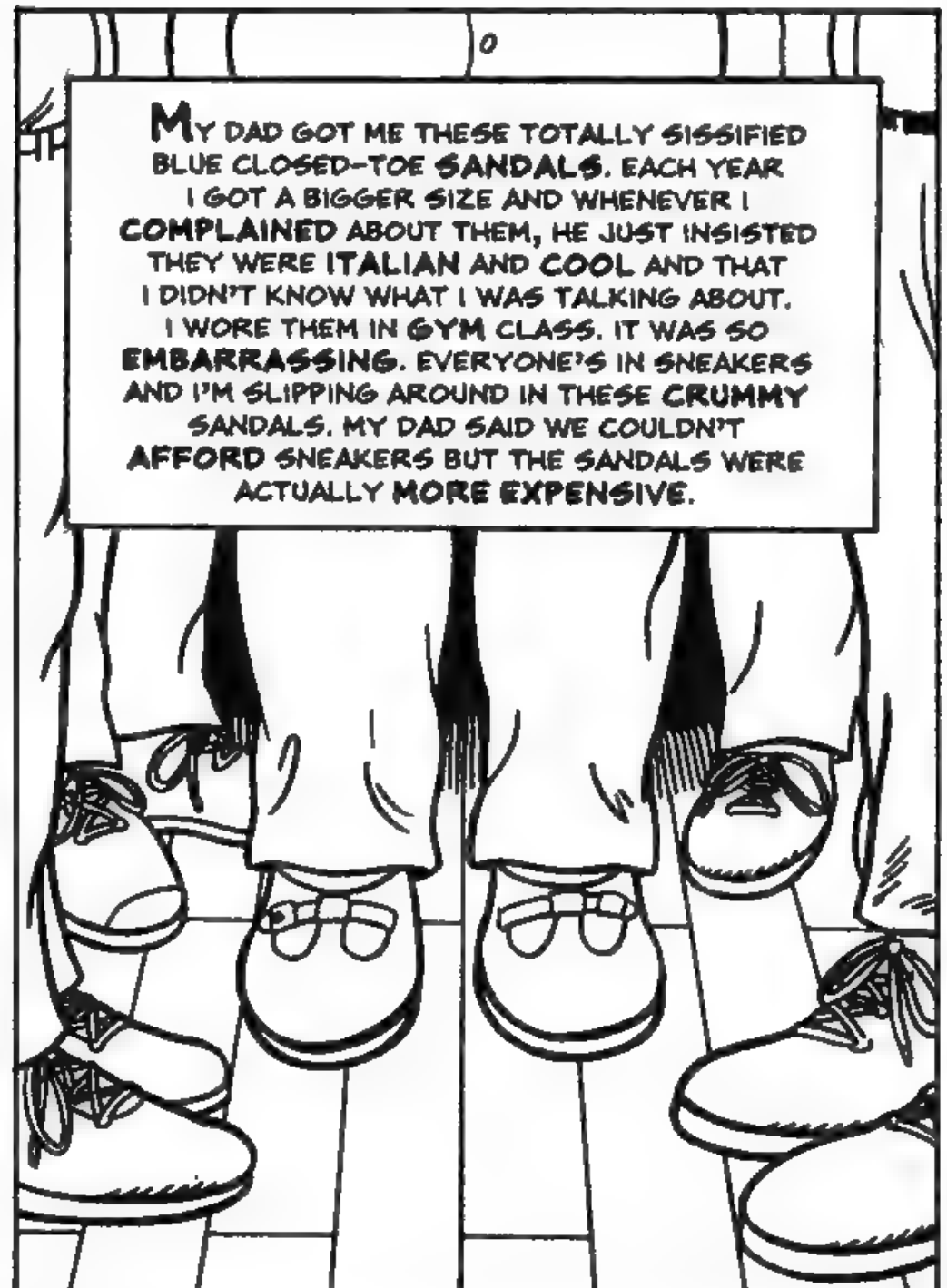


I HAD TO TAKE A TEST. I DON'T KNOW IF IT WAS A TEST TO GET IN OR A TEST TO GET A SCHOLARSHIP. I HAD TO GO IN THE OFFICE AND ANSWER ALL SORTS OF QUESTIONS. ONE THING I REMEMBER WAS THAT I HAD TO TAKE BLOCKS AND PUT THEM IN ROWS, WITH A CERTAIN NUMBER IN EACH ROW. HE ALSO ASKED ME WHICH PLANET HAD RINGS, AND I REMEMBER THINKING EVERYONE KNEW IT WAS SATURN.





THEN WE WENT TO MEET THE TEACHER AND SHE ASKED ME SOME QUESTIONS. I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT SUSPENDERS WERE CALLED IN ENGLISH AND FELT EMBARRASSED. I GUESS I DID GREAT BECAUSE I GOT IN. THEY GAVE ME A FREE SET OF TEFILLIN AND A FREE TORAH.



MY DAD GOT ME THESE TOTALLY SISSIFIED BLUE CLOSED-TOE SANDALS. EACH YEAR I GOT A BIGGER SIZE AND WHENEVER I COMPLAINED ABOUT THEM, HE JUST INSISTED THEY WERE ITALIAN AND COOL AND THAT I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT I WAS TALKING ABOUT. I WORE THEM IN GYM CLASS. IT WAS SO EMBARRASSING. EVERYONE'S IN SNEAKERS AND I'M SLIPPING AROUND IN THESE CRUMMY SANDALS. MY DAD SAID WE COULDN'T AFFORD SNEAKERS BUT THE SANDALS WERE ACTUALLY MORE EXPENSIVE.



THE SCHOOL DAY ENDED LATE, AT FOUR OR SOMETHING, AND THEN WE GOT OUT AT 1:45 ON FRIDAYS BECAUSE OF SABBATH. MY GRANDPARENTS LIVED NEAR THE SCHOOL. EVERY DAY MY GRANDMOTHER WOULD PICK ME UP WITH A BOTTLE OF HOT TEA AND A STRAW.



IT WOULD BE A WEEK LATER, AND THE ACTORS WOULD STILL BE IN THE SAME SITUATION. AND YET SHE COULDN'T MISS AN EPISODE. I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND THIS AT ALL.

I CAME TO KINDERGARTEN EXPECTING TO BE THE SMARTEST KID IN THE CLASS. WELL, I COMPLETELY FLIPPED WHEN I GOT THERE BECAUSE SUSAN FURMANSKI AND ALVIN LOSHAK KNEW HOW TO READ, AND I DIDN'T.



I WENT HOME AND MADE MY DAD TEACH ME TO READ.

I WAS ALSO NEVER TIRED AS A KID, SO WHEN THEY HAD NAPTIME IT WAS LIKE CHINESE WATER TORTURE. I HAD TO LIE THERE IN THE DARK, STARING AT THE CEILING FOR WHAT FELT LIKE HOURS. I'M PRETTY SURE MY BEDTIME WAS 8 P.M., AND I WOKE UP AT 6 OR 7. I'M REMEMBERING IT WAS 8 BECAUSE I GOT TO GO TO BED AT 10 WHEN "THREE'S COMPANY" ENDED AND ALSO WHEN "ALICE" ENDED, AND IT WAS A BIG DEAL.



ONE TIME IN KINDERGARTEN THE TEACHER SPANKED ANOTHER KID. I WENT UP TO HER AND TOLD HER THAT SHE SHOULDN'T HIT LITTLE PEOPLE. SHE TOLD ME IT WAS WRONG OF ME TO TALK TO HER LIKE THAT, AND THAT UNTIL I APOLOGIZED I COULDN'T COME BACK TO HER CLASS.

WELL, THE THOUGHT OF APOLOGIZING WHEN I WAS RIGHT NEVER ENTERED MY HEAD.



SO THE NEXT MORNING I WAS SITTING ON MY BED IN MY PARENTS' BEDROOM. THEY WERE GETTING READY FOR WORK AND WERE ACTING AS IF THEY DIDN'T KNOW THAT I COULDN'T GO TO SCHOOL. I THOUGHT THAT THIS WAS SOME KIND OF A TRICK, FOR SURELY ALL ADULTS KNOW EVERYTHING THAT ALL OTHER ADULTS KNOW. MY DAD ASKED ME WHY I WASN'T DRESSED, AND I TOLD HIM I WASN'T ALLOWED BACK INTO SCHOOL. I THINK HE HAD TO GO SEE THE PRINCIPAL, AND IT ALL GOT WORKED OUT.

STARTING IN FIRST GRADE WE WERE TAUGHT HALF THE DAY IN HEBREW AND HALF IN ENGLISH. DURING THE HEBREW HALF WE LEARNED ABOUT THE JEWISH LANGUAGE AND CULTURE AS WELL AS STUDYING THE TORAH. THERE WAS ALL THIS TALK ABOUT SACRIFICING IN THE TORAH, ANIMALS BEING SLAUGHTERED AND SACRIFICED TO GOD.

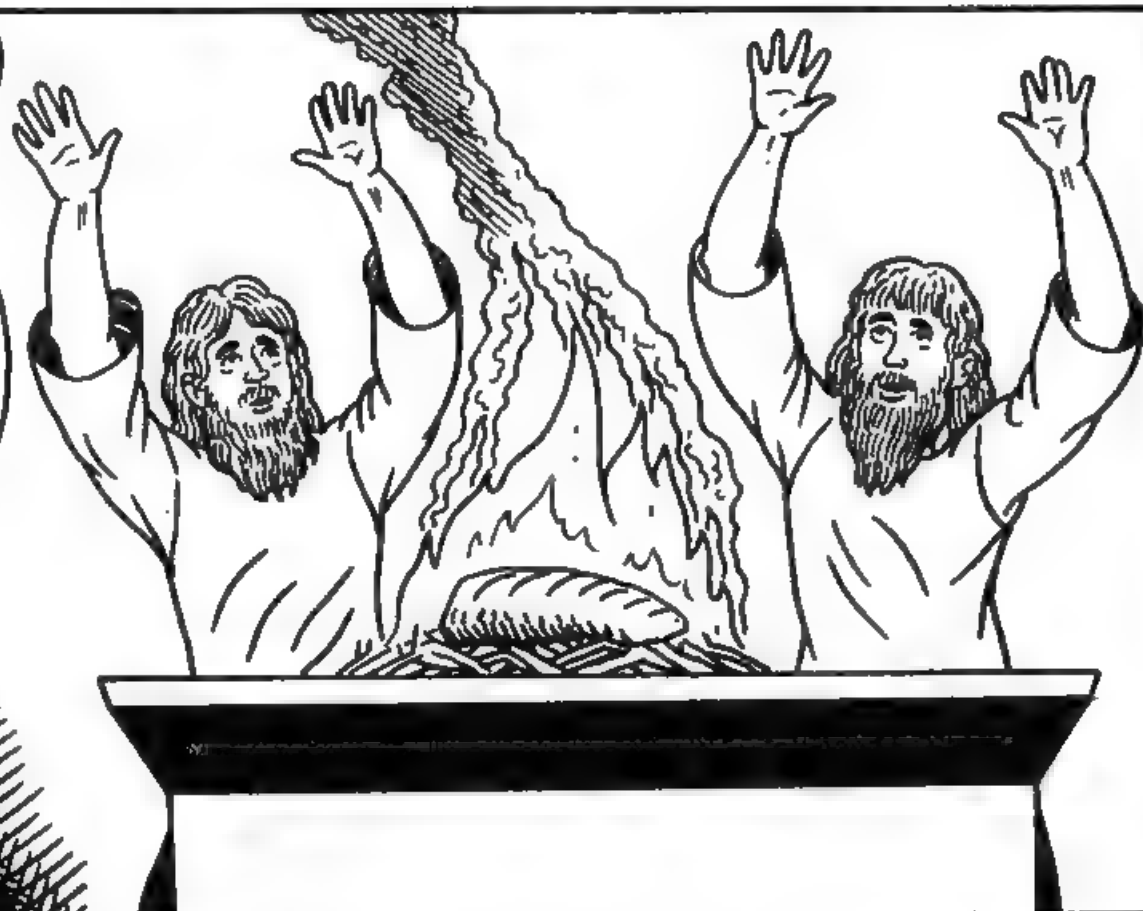


I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND TECHNICALLY WHAT SACRIFICING WAS. I ASKED ABOUT IT, HOW A SACRIFICE WAS GIVEN TO GOD.

I HAD BEEN VISUALIZING A PILE OF MEAT ON AN ALTAR, AND A HUGE HAND COMING FROM NOWHERE AND TAKING IT AWAY.

THEY TOLD ME THAT THEY PUT THE MEAT ON AN ALTAR AND BURNED IT.

I THOUGHT THIS WAS THE STUPIDEST THING THAT I HAD EVER HEARD.



MY PARENTS WERE ATHEISTS, ALTHOUGH MY MOTHER WAS TOO MUCH OF A DIMWITTED COWARD TO CALL HERSELF ONE. BECAUSE OF THIS, AND BECAUSE THE SCHOOL WAS SO FAR AWAY FROM MY HOUSE, I COULD NOT HAVE ANY FRIENDS GROWING UP, LEST THEY FIND OUT I WAS NOT A PRACTICING JEW.

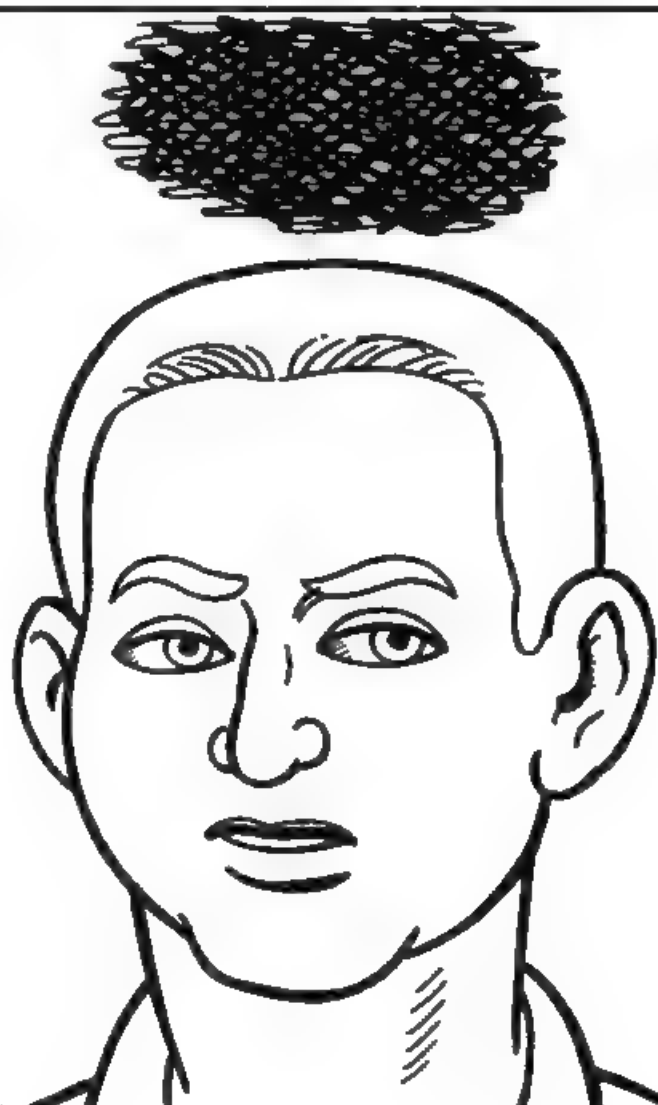


I DISTINCTLY REMEMBER MY MOTHER TELLING ME THAT I HAD NO FRIENDS, THAT I WAS A BAD PERSON, AND THAT IF SHE WERE MY AGE SHE WOULDN'T BE FRIENDS WITH ME.

MY WEEKENDS WERE SPENT BEING DRAGGED TO WHATEVER MY PARENTS FELT LIKE. I SPENT HOURS IN FRUIT STORES WHILE MY MOTHER BOUGHT FRUIT FOR US. BUT THE WORST WAS WHEN SHE WENT CLOTHES SHOPPING. THERE WAS ONE STORE SHE LOVED CALLED "DAFFY DAN'S." THERE WASN'T EVEN A PLACE TO SIT. MAYBE I HAD A BOOK, BUT YOU CAN ONLY READ FOR SO LONG BEFORE YOU GET TIRED OF IT.



SHE DIDN'T CARE. SHE NEEDED TO GET CLOTHES. I HAD TO TRY TO BALANCE MYSELF ON THE EDGE OF A PLATFORM AND WAIT FOR HER WITH ABSOLUTELY NOTHING TO DO. I DESPISED HER FOR IT. I WAS RIGHT TO, OF COURSE, BUT WHEN YOU'RE YOUNG YOU THINK IT'S WRONG TO DISLIKE YOUR PARENTS, SO I WOULD REPRESS THE SITUATION.



MY CONTEMPT FOR AUTHORITY CONTINUED IN FIRST GRADE.

WE HAD TO DELIVER BOOK REPORTS ON BOOKS WE HAD READ.



THERE WAS A SERIES OF BOOKS CALLED THE MR. MEN (MR. HAPPY, MR. GREEDY, ETC). MY DAD TOLD ME IF I FINISHED MY LUNCH EVERY DAY, HE WOULD BUY ME ONE. I NEVER DID, BUT I LIED. HE ALSO MADE ME BRING A BAG OF APPLES TO SCHOOL EVERY DAY, AND EVERY DAY THOSE APPLES WENT IN THE TRASH.

ANYWAY, I WAS DOING MY REPORT ON ONE OF THOSE BOOKS ENTITLED "MR. CLEVER." I STARTED OFF BY SAYING THAT MR. CLEVER LIVES IN CLEVELAND.

IT'S CLEVELAND...

...THE TEACHER INTERRUPTED. "BUT THERE'S AN 'R' IN IT," I PROTESTED. "IT'S SILENT," SHE REPLIED. SO I HAD TO DELIVER A REPORT ABOUT HOW MR. CLEVER LIVED IN CLEVELAND. I FUMED ALL DAY.

THEN WHEN I GOT HOME I INNOCENTLY ASKED MY DAD, JUST IN CASE HE WAS IN CAHOOTS WITH THE TEACHER, WHAT THAT CERTAIN WORD WAS.

CLEVELAND...

...HE SAID. I HAVE NEVER FORGOTTEN THAT MOMENT.

FIRST GRADE WAS ALSO THE FIRST TIME I REMEMBER HAVING ANYTHING CLOSE TO A POLITICAL THOUGHT. LISA ROSENBERG WAS READING SOME ESSAY ABOUT PLAYING WITH HER SISTER. IT ENDED WITH THE LINE...

...WHEN YOU SHARE YOU ALWAYS GET MORE.

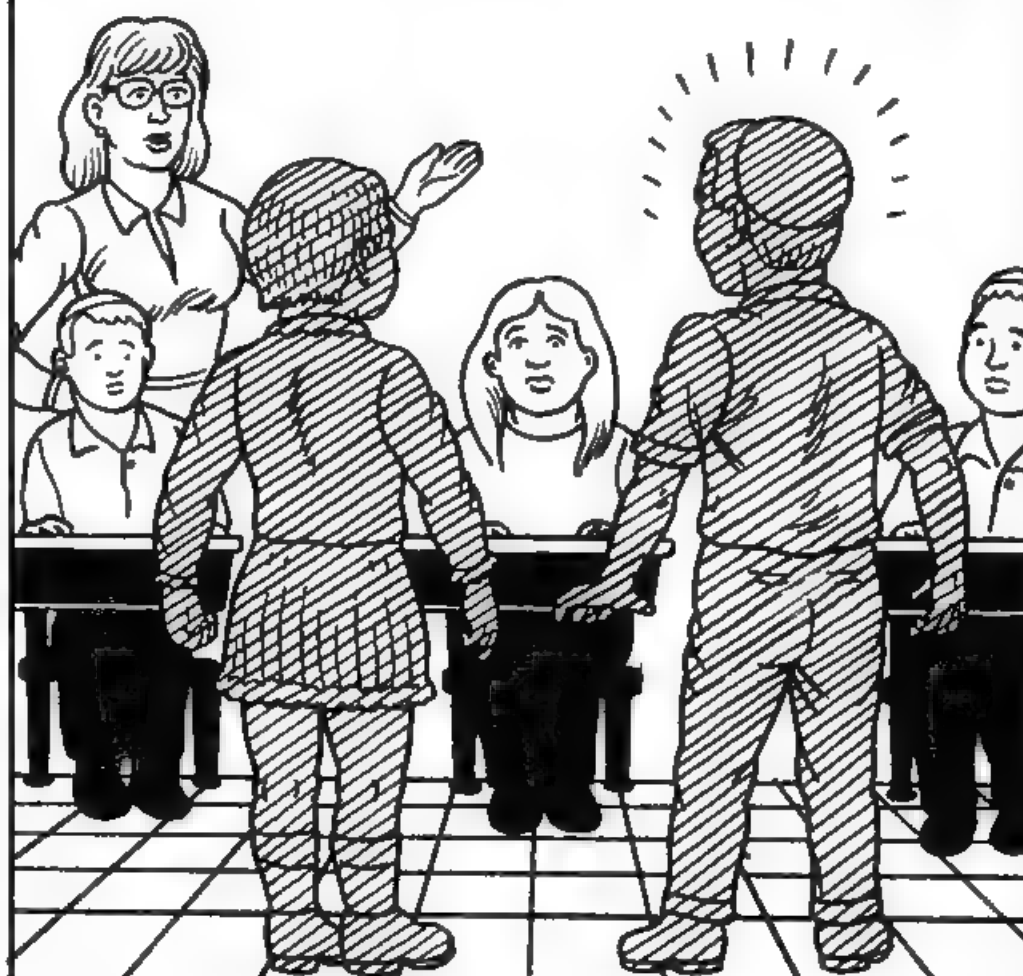
HA, HA, HA!

I THOUGHT THAT WAS SUCH AN IDIOTIC STATEMENT THAT I STARTED LAUGHING. I LOOKED AROUND AND EVERYONE WAS NODDING OR NOT REACTING AT ALL. I SHUT MY MOUTH AND WAS JUST COMPLETELY BAFFLED.

I WOULD ALSO GET BORED WITH THE HOMEWORK. WE HAD TO TAKE VOCABULARY WORDS AND MAKE SENTENCES WITH THEM. SO TO DO THE ABSOLUTE MINIMUM I WOULD MAKE ONE SENTENCE WITH THREE WORDS AND WRITE IT THREE TIMES.



LIKE IF THE WORDS WERE "TIGER," "STORE," AND "PENCIL," I WOULD LITERALLY WRITE "THE TIGER BOUGHT A PENCIL AT THE STORE, THE TIGER BOUGHT A PENCIL AT THE STORE, THE TIGER BOUGHT A PENCIL AT THE STORE."

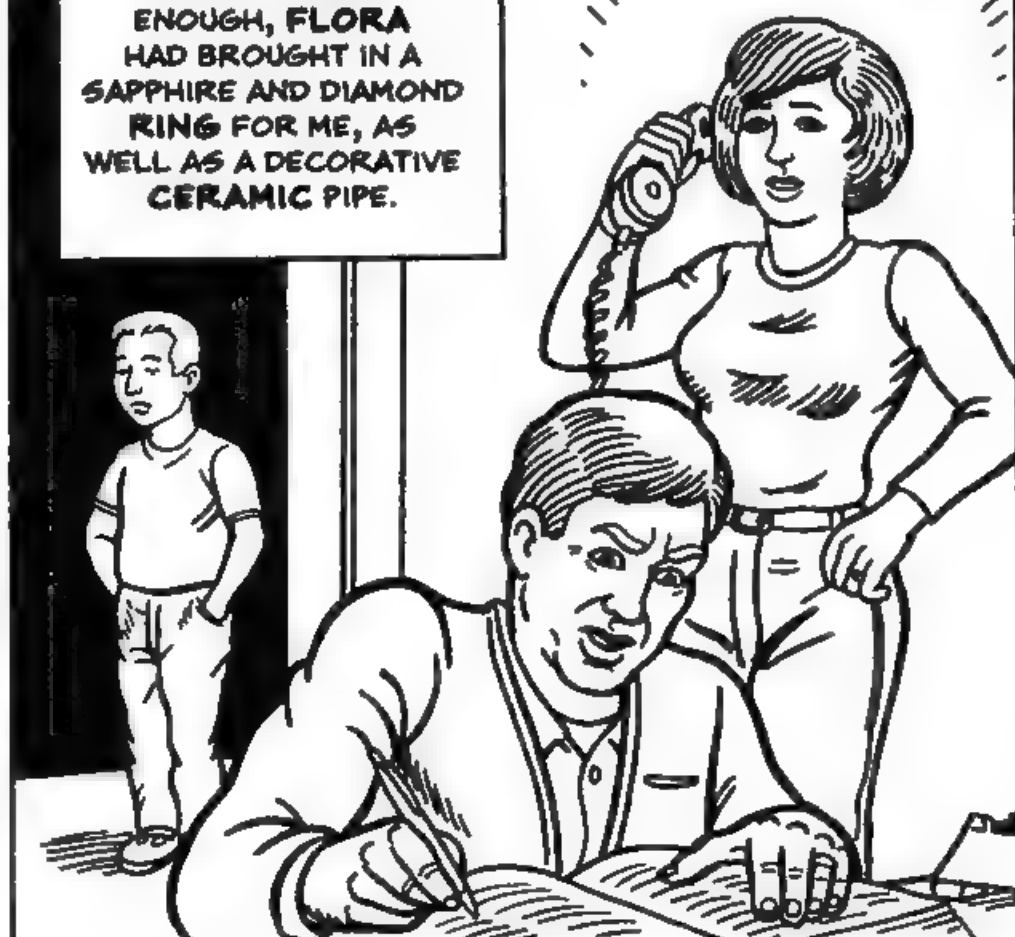


EVERY FRIDAY WE WOULD HAVE A SABBATH DINNER SIMULATION AT SCHOOL. ONE BOY IN THE CLASS WAS ASSIGNED TO BE THE FATHER OF THE CLASS AND A GIRL TO BE THE MOTHER. THE WEEK I WAS PICKED IN SECOND GRADE, A GIRL NAMED FLORA WAS ALSO PICKED. SHE WAS THE OTHER RUSSIAN JEWISH KID SO NOW I SUSPECT IT WAS NO COINCIDENCE. ANYWAY, FLORA PULLED ME ASIDE DURING THE CEREMONY AND ASKED ME HOW I WOULD LIKE IT IF WE REALLY GOT MARRIED. WHY ANYONE WOULD WANT TO MARRY A GIRL WAS BEYOND ME.

THEN SHE TOLD ME THAT SHE'D BRING ME A WEDDING RING AND ASKED ME WHAT KIND OF JEWEL I WANTED ON IT. I DIDN'T KNOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE VARIOUS GEMSTONES, SO SHE EXPLAINED THEM TO ME. I FINALLY SETTLED ON A SAPPHIRE RING BECAUSE PURPLE WAS MY FAVORITE COLOR.



MONDAY CAME AROUND AND SURE ENOUGH, FLORA HAD BROUGHT IN A SAPPHIRE AND DIAMOND RING FOR ME, AS WELL AS A DECORATIVE CERAMIC PIPE.



I WAS VERY PROUD OF SCORING A SAPPHIRE RING AT AGE SEVEN. WELL, WHEN I GOT HOME MY PARENTS PRACTICALLY HAD STROKES. THEY ASKED ME FLORA'S NAME AND WENT THROUGH THE PHONE BOOK CALLING EVERY STEPANSKY TO FIND OUT IF THEY HAD A DAUGHTER NAMED FLORA.

THEY TOOK THE RING FROM ME. I WAS SO UPSET. HERE I WAS THINKING THAT THEY'D BE PROUD OF ME. FLORA AND I ARE STILL GOOD FRIENDS. I JUST WENT TO HER WEDDING IN JUNE. SHE'S A DOCTOR, AND SO IS HER HUSBAND. WE OFTEN GET INTO THESE VIOLENT SCREAMING MATCHES THAT ARE HEATED.

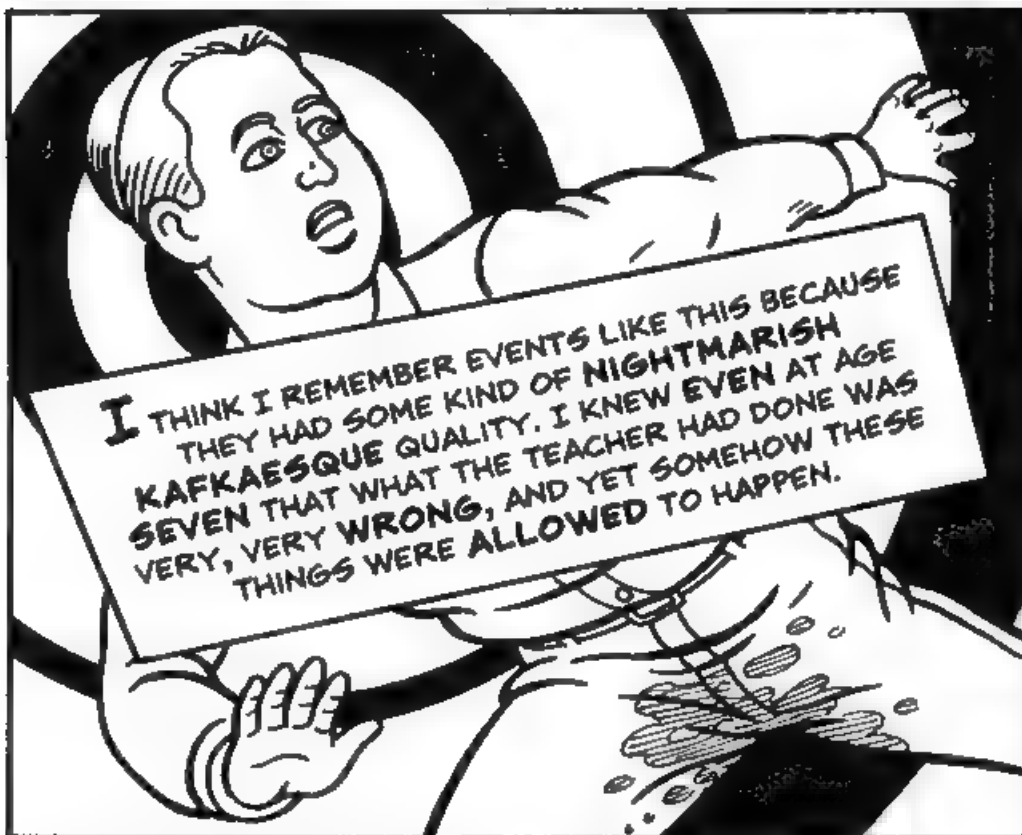


THE ENGLISH TEACHER DURING SECOND GRADE WAS A BUSTED WOMAN NAMED MRS. STEIN. WHENEVER WE WENT TO THE BATHROOM WE HAD TO BRING A BUDDY WITH US. ONE TIME I WENT WITH MY BUDDY, DAVID, BUT BY THE TIME I WENT INTO THE HALL I DIDN'T WANT TO PEE ANYMORE, SO I JUST TOOK A DRINK OF WATER AND WENT BACK IN THE ROOM. MRS. STONE ASKED ME WHY WE WERE BACK SO QUICKLY AND DAVID TOLD HER I ONLY HAD A DRINK.

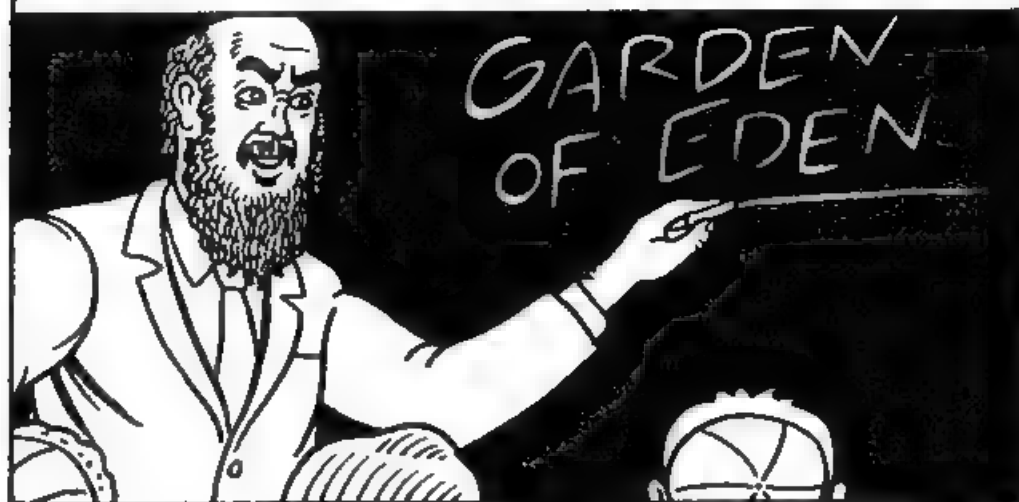
AS PUNISHMENT FOR "LYING" SHE SAID THAT I WASN'T ALLOWED TO GO TO THE BATHROOM FOR A MONTH. I WOUND UP PEEING IN MY PANTS ONCE. I DON'T REMEMBER IF I EVEN ASKED TO GO TO THE BATHROOM, OR IF SHE REFUSED ME. ANYWAY, MY PARENTS ALMOST GOT HER FIRED.



I THINK I REMEMBER EVENTS LIKE THIS BECAUSE THEY HAD SOME KIND OF NIGHTMARISH KAFKAESQUE QUALITY. I KNEW EVEN AT AGE SEVEN THAT WHAT THE TEACHER HAD DONE WAS VERY, VERY WRONG, AND YET SOMEHOW THESE THINGS WERE ALLOWED TO HAPPEN.



MR. COOPER WAS THE HEBREW TEACHER DURING SECOND GRADE. HE WAS OLD AND KIND. HE TOLD US THAT THE GARDEN OF EDEN WAS A REAL PLACE ON EARTH, AND THAT THEY KNEW WHERE IT WAS. HE TOLD US HE WOULD TELL US NEXT WEEK. WELL, HE GOT VERY SICK AND SOON DIED. HE NEVER ENDED SAYING WHAT HE MEANT BY THAT. THE FACT THAT I DON'T HAVE CLOSURE ON THAT BOTHERS ME TO THIS DAY.



I REMEMBER READING A BOOK ON GREEK MYTHOLOGY AND BEING SCARED TO BRING IT IN FOR A BOOK REPORT, LEST THE TEACHER THINK I WORSHIPPED ZEUS. MY DAD ASSURED ME THAT IT WAS OKAY, BUT I WASN'T SURE WHAT WAS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MEDUSA AND THE BIBLE STORIES WE WERE TAUGHT TO BELIEVE. THERE WASN'T ANY AT ALL.



THE WHOLE TIME I WAS IN YESHIVAH I WORE MY YARMULKE AND PRETENDED THAT WE KEPT KOSHER AT HOME, THE WHOLE NINE YARDS. ONE TIME THE TEACHER ASKED US WHO IN CLASS DIDN'T CELEBRATE SABBATH. I TURNED AROUND AND LOOKED AT FLORA, AND SHE SHOT ME A GLARE THAT MEANT THAT I SHOULD KEEP MY MOUTH SHUT. NOT CELEBRATING SABBATH WAS LIKE BEING GAY AND IN THE CLOSET; YOU KNEW THAT IF YOU TOLD THERE WOULD BE EITHER DENUNCIATION OR PITY. NEITHER A GOOD CHOICE.



MARK, THE OTHER SMART KID, RAISED HIS HAND AND ADMITTED THAT HE DIDN'T CELEBRATE SABBATH AT HOME. WHAT A SHOCKING TURN OF EVENTS! MARK, WHO'D ALWAYS WORKED SO HARD ON HIS PROJECTS, WASN'T RELIGIOUS! THE TEACHER TOOK HIM OUT OF THE ROOM. WHEN SHE BROUGHT HIM BACK SHE ANNOUNCED THAT THEY HAD CALLED HIS PARENTS, AND THAT THEY WOULD BE CELEBRATING SABBATH FROM NOW ON. MARK HAD BEEN CRYING AND STILL WAS. WHAT A CHUMP! IF THERE'S ANYTHING RUSSIANS KNOW, IT'S TO KEEP OUR MOUTHS SHUT AND NOT SHOW WEAKNESS TO OTHER PEOPLE.



MY DAD HAD NO CONCEPT THAT OTHER PEOPLE HAD VALUES OR NEEDED TO HAVE THEIR PRIVACY RESPECTED. HE WOULD ROUTINELY OPEN MAIL ADDRESSED TO MY MOTHER OR (LATER) ME. IF YOU CONFRONTED HIM ON IT HE'D SAY "SORRY" IN AN ANNOYED TONE. BY "SORRY" HE MEANT "THIS IS ANNOYING ME SO I'M GOING TO SAY WHAT I NEED TO GET YOU TO LEAVE ME ALONE."

SORRY...



HE WOULD TAKE MONEY OUT OF MOM'S PURSE ALL THE TIME. SHE GOT A JOB AS A CLERK, AND IT WAS ONLY WHEN SHE GOT TO THE TRAIN STATION ON HER FIRST DAY OF WORK THAT SHE REALIZED HE HADN'T LEFT HER A CENT IN HER PURSE. SHE HAD TO GO ALL THE WAY BACK HOME TO PICK UP SOME MONEY, CRYING ALL THE WAY.



I REMEMBER WHEN I WAS FIVE OR SIX AND COMING INTO MY ROOM AND FINDING HIM READING MY DIARY. RATHER THAN BEING EMBARRASSED AT BEING CAUGHT, HE PROCEEDED TO INTERROGATE ME ABOUT THINGS I HAD WRITTEN.



WHEN I WAS A KID I HAD A SHEET OF PAPER ON MY DOOR AND PUT STICKERS ON IT IN NEAT COLUMNS. WHEN WE HAD THE APARTMENT REPAINTED ONE WEEKEND HE TOOK IT OFF AND THREW IT OUT. I COULDN'T UNDERSTAND HOW HE COULD SO CAVALIERLY PUT SOMETHING I CARED ABOUT IN THE GARBAGE. THERE WAS NO REMORSE ON HIS PART. HE WOULD REPEATEDLY GO THROUGH MY STUFF AND THROW OUT THINGS HE DECIDED I NO LONGER NEEDED. IF I COMPLAINED OR CRIED HE JUST SHRUGGED. "IT'S GONE NOW," HE WOULD SAY.

WHEN I WAS IN FOURTH GRADE I WENT INTO THIS NEWSSTAND ON THE WAY HOME WITH MY GRANDMOTHER AFTER SCHOOL. I BOUGHT A COUPLE OF COMIC BOOKS, AND I WAS HOOKED. THEY WERE "CRISIS ON INFINITE EARTHS" #1 AND "FIRESTORM THE NUCLEAR MAN" #35.

KILLER FROST



... YOUR CITY, COVERED WITH ICE-- ONLY I CAN RELEASE THE EIGHT MILLION PEOPLE INSIDE!

I WAS UTTERLY IN LOVE WITH FIRESTORM'S ARCH ENEMY KILLER FROST. SHE WAS THIS ICE MAIDEN WHO FROZE NEW YORK CITY SOLID AND DECLARED HERSELF QUEEN. I'M STILL ARTISTICALLY VERY DRAWN TO IMAGES OF VERY COLD AND RUTHLESSLY POWERFUL WOMEN. (ON A RELATIONSHIP LEVEL, OF COURSE, WOMEN LIKE THAT LEAVE MUCH TO BE DESIRED).



WHAT REALLY MOVED ME ABOUT "CRISIS" WAS THE COMPANION SERIES TO IT, "WHO'S WHO," WHICH WAS A HANDBOOK ABOUT THE DC UNIVERSE. THERE WERE MANY WEIRD AND INTERESTING CHARACTERS, AND I WANTED TO KNOW ALL ABOUT THEM, PEOPLE LIKE BAT-MITE, THE METAL MEN, BLACK ORCHID OR BOUNCING BOY AND DUO DAMSEL OF THE LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES. I HAVE EVERY APPEARANCE OF THEIRS.

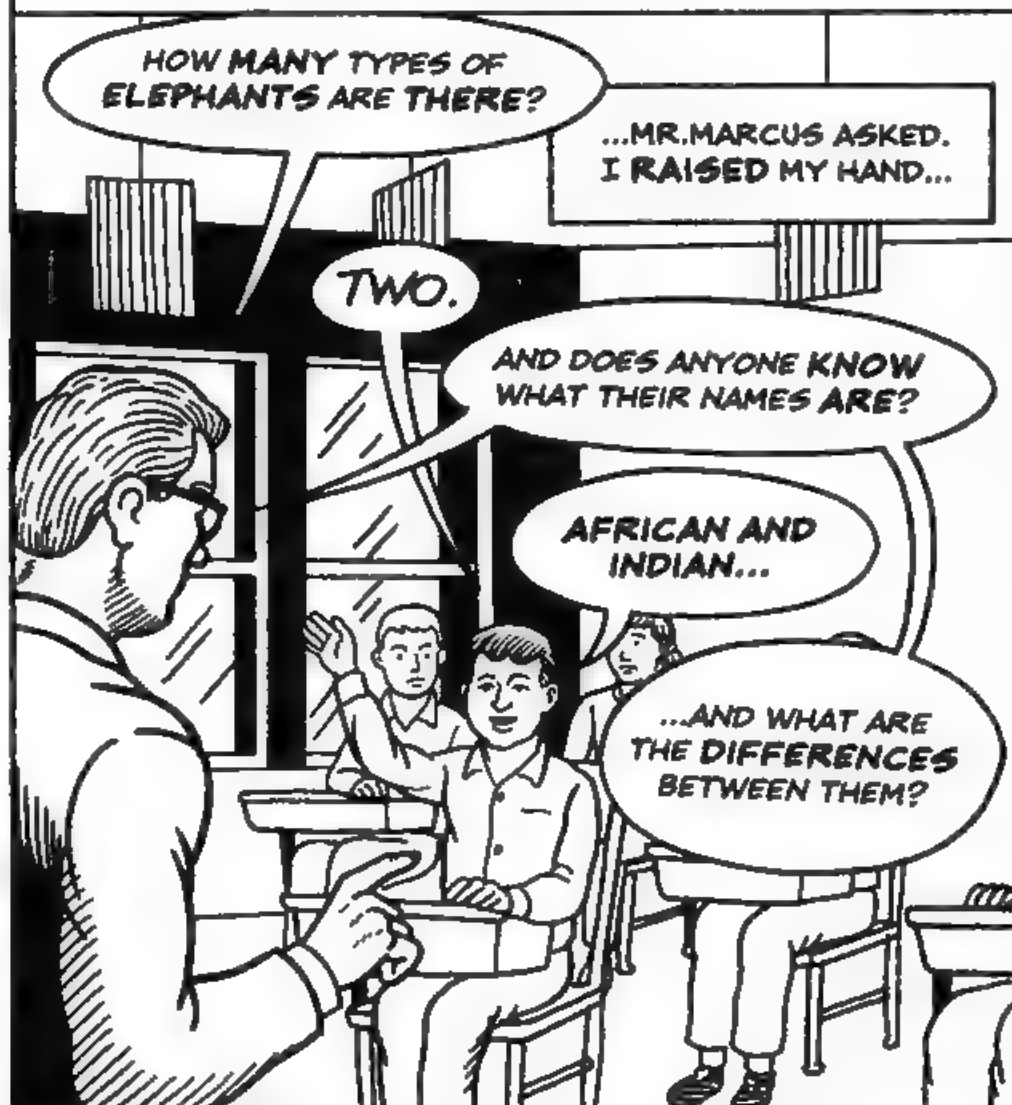


GROWING UP I ALSO IDOLIZED HORDAK, HE-MAN'S ARCH ENEMY. I THOUGHT HE WAS SO COOL. HE CAME TO ETERNIA, HE-MAN'S PLANET, AND KICKED BOTH HE-MAN'S AND SKELETOR'S ASSES. SKELETOR DROVE ME CRAZY BECAUSE HE WOULD HAVE THIS BRILLIANT PLAN, AND YET HE LET HIS HENCHMEN SCREW THINGS UP. I WANTED HIM TO WIN SO BAD.

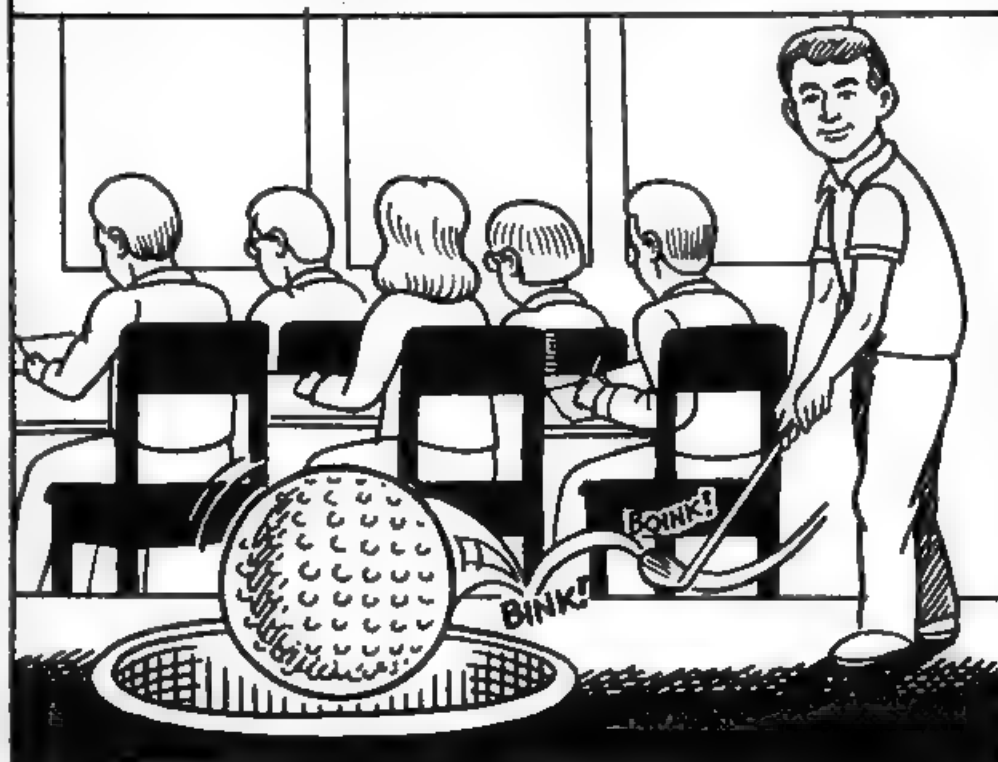
ABOUT HALFWAY THROUGH THE FOURTH GRADE MY PARENTS BOUGHT A CONDO, AND WE MOVED TO GEORGETOWN. THIS ALSO MEANT THAT I WOULD BE GOING TO PUBLIC SCHOOL. I WAS TERRIFIED TO GO TO PUBLIC SCHOOL. I REMEMBER SOMEONE TELLING ME THEY CHEW GUM IN PUBLIC SCHOOL, THIS BEING AN EXAMPLE OF THEIR UTTER DEGENERACY. WE WERE PRETTY ISOLATED IN THAT YESHIVAH, LET ME TELL YOU.



BECAUSE I WAS TRANSFERRING IN THE MIDDLE OF THE YEAR, I COULDN'T GO INTO THE HONORS CLASS, SO THEY STUCK ME IN A NORMAL CLASS. WHEN I WALKED IN THERE, THERE WERE MOBILES THAT THE CLASS HAD MADE HANGING FROM THE CEILING. ONE OF THEM HAD A PHOTO LABELLED "CHIKEN." I WAS MORTIFIED. WITHIN 10 MINUTES I WASN'T FITTING IN.



I WAS ABOUT TO ANSWER WHEN I REALIZED THAT EVERYONE IN THE ROOM WAS STARING AT ME AND WHISPERING. HE LOOKED TO ME FOR THE ANSWER, AND I PRETENDED I DIDN'T KNOW. MR. MARCUS LATER TOLD ME THAT HE WENT TO THE PRINCIPAL THAT DAY AND TOLD HIM I DIDN'T BELONG IN HIS CLASS.



MR. MARCUS SET UP A HOLE OF GOLF ON ASTROTURF IN THE BACK OF THE ROOM, AND WHOEVER FINISHED A TEST FIRST COULD PLAY GOLF. ONE GUESS WHO WAS THE TIGER WOODS OF THAT CLASS. I READ THE "GREAT BRAIN" SERIES AT THAT TIME ABOUT A BOY GENIUS WHO GREW UP IN UTAH IN THE 1890S AND ROUTINELY OUTSMARTED THE ADULTS. IT GAVE ME SOLACE.



IN THE FIFTH GRADE I SWITCHED TO EAGLE CLASS, WHICH WAS THE HONORS PROGRAM. EVERY KID IN THAT CLASS HAD BEEN IN THE PROGRAM SINCE KINDERGARTEN, SO THEY ALL KNEW EACH OTHER. I WAS THE NEW KID, JUST LIKE ON SOME LAME SITCOM. I WAS THE SMARTEST KID IN THE CLASS TOO, BUT I WAS (AND REMAIN) EXTREMELY LAZY, WHICH DID NOT GET ME POINTS WITH MRS. GREEN, WHO I'LL GET TO IN A MINUTE.

WHEN I WAS A BABY MY PARENTS WERE WORRIED ABOUT ME BECAUSE I WASN'T LIFTING MY HEAD UP WAY PAST THE AGE I SHOULD'VE. THEY TOOK ME TO THE DOCTOR, WHO RAN SOME TESTS.

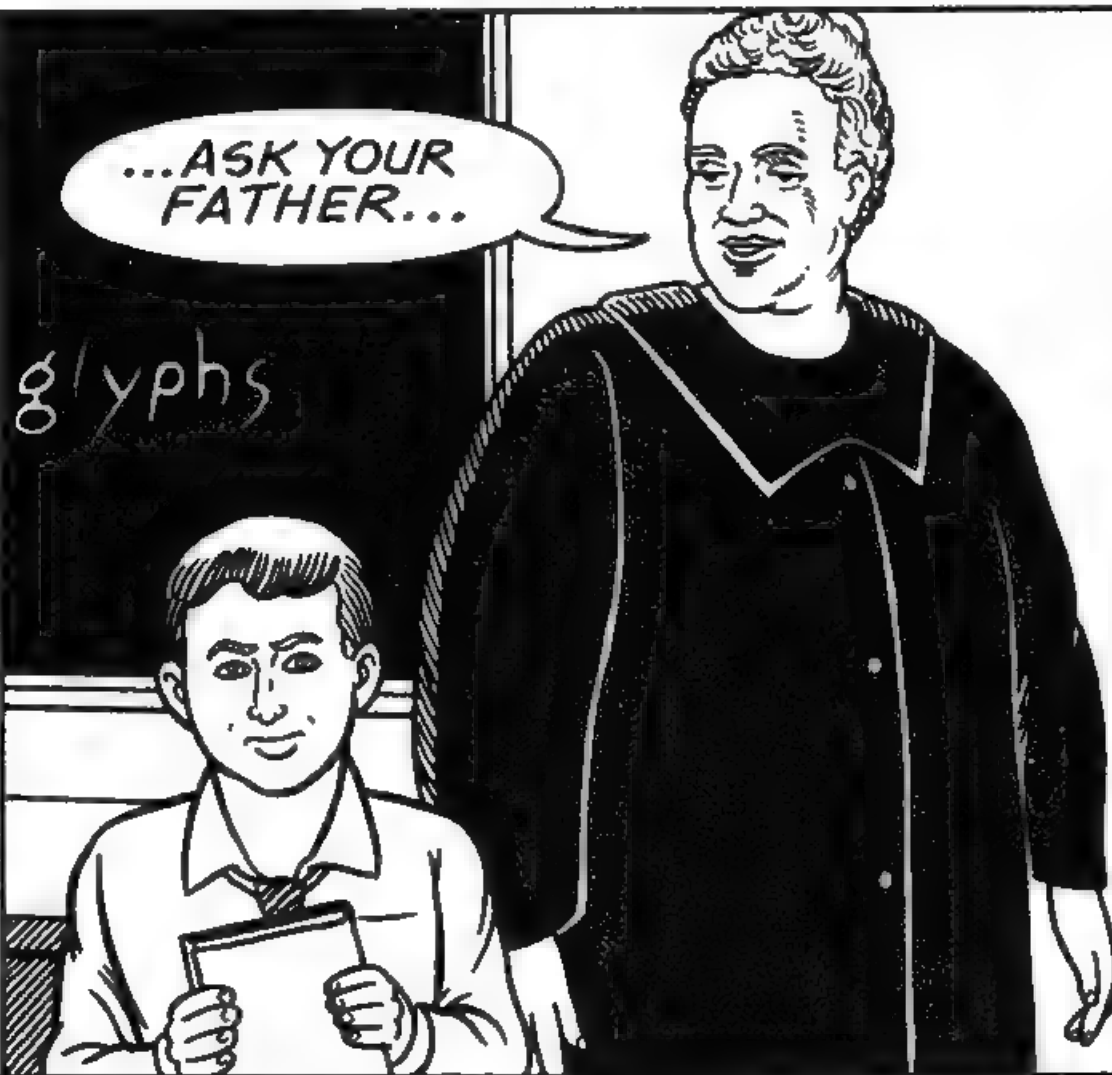
HE CAN LIFT HIS HEAD FINE. HE'S JUST LAZY.



ALL MY LIFE IN SCHOOL I HAVE ALWAYS DONE THE BARE MINIMUM. I ALWAYS DID WELL ON TESTS, ESPECIALLY SINCE I WAS ABLE TO GET INTO THE TEACHER'S HEAD AND, BASED ON THE WORDING OF THE QUESTIONS, FIGURE OUT THE ANSWERS IF I WAS UNSURE. REPORTS OR PROJECTS WERE ALWAYS SIMPLY ADEQUATE. I REALIZED VERY EARLY ON THAT IT IS MUCH MORE IMPORTANT FOR ME TO KNOW THE MATERIAL THAN TO DEMONSTRATE TO SOME TEACHER THAT I KNEW IT, AND THAT WORKING HARD ON SOMETHING WOULD BENEFIT ME IN NO WAY. I DO NOT SUBSCRIBE TO THE PROTESTANT ETHIC WHICH HOLDS HARD WORK IS AN END IN ITSELF. RATHER, HARD WORK IS A MEANS TO FURTHERING YOUR GOALS.

MRS. GREEN WAS A CRAZY OLD WITCH. SHE EVEN LOOKED LIKE A WITCH. SHE WORE THE SAME BLACK DRESS EVERY DAY. THE ONE TIME SHE WORE A BLUE DRESS WAS WHEN SHE DRAGGED US ALL TO SEE "LA BOHEME" AT THE METROPOLITAN OPERA. I WANTED TO SHOOT MYSELF, I WAS SO BORED. MRS. GREEN USED TO ASSIGN US A LOT OF WORK AND THE FACT THAT I WAS THE STAR PUPIL AND WOULDN'T DO IT WOULD DRIVE HER CRAZY. SHE USED TO PLAY A VOCABULARY GAME WITH US EVERY DAY, AND WHOEVER HAD THE MOST POINTS AT THE END OF THE YEAR WOULD GET A REFERENCE BOOK. I THINK I HAD DOUBLE THE POINTS OF THE SECOND BEST STUDENT, SO I CHOSE A THESAURUS, WHICH I STILL HAVE.

...ASK YOUR FATHER...



ONE TIME I MADE HER LAUGH BECAUSE PART OF THE GAME WAS SUGGESTING VOCABULARY WORDS WE DIDN'T KNOW TO ASK THE CLASS. I HAD COME ACROSS THE WORD "PHALLUS", BECAUSE I WAS STUDYING EGYPTIAN HIEROGLYPHS. SHE TOLD ME TO ASK MY FATHER WHAT IT MEANT. SOMETIMES SHE WOULD ALSO PULL ME ASIDE AND DO THE NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD PUZZLE WITH ME.

FIFTH GRADE WAS THE FIRST TIME THAT I ACTUALLY HAD A COUPLE OF FRIENDS, SINCE I LIVED NEXT TO THE SCHOOL AND COULD HAVE PEOPLE VISIT ME. I, OF COURSE, WON THE SCHOOL SPELLING BEE AND WENT ON TO THE DISTRICT SPELLING BEE. THE DISTRICT SPELLING BEE HAD KIDS FROM GRADES 5 TO 8, SO I WAS THE YOUNGEST ONE THERE, AND ALSO THE SHORTEST (AS USUAL).



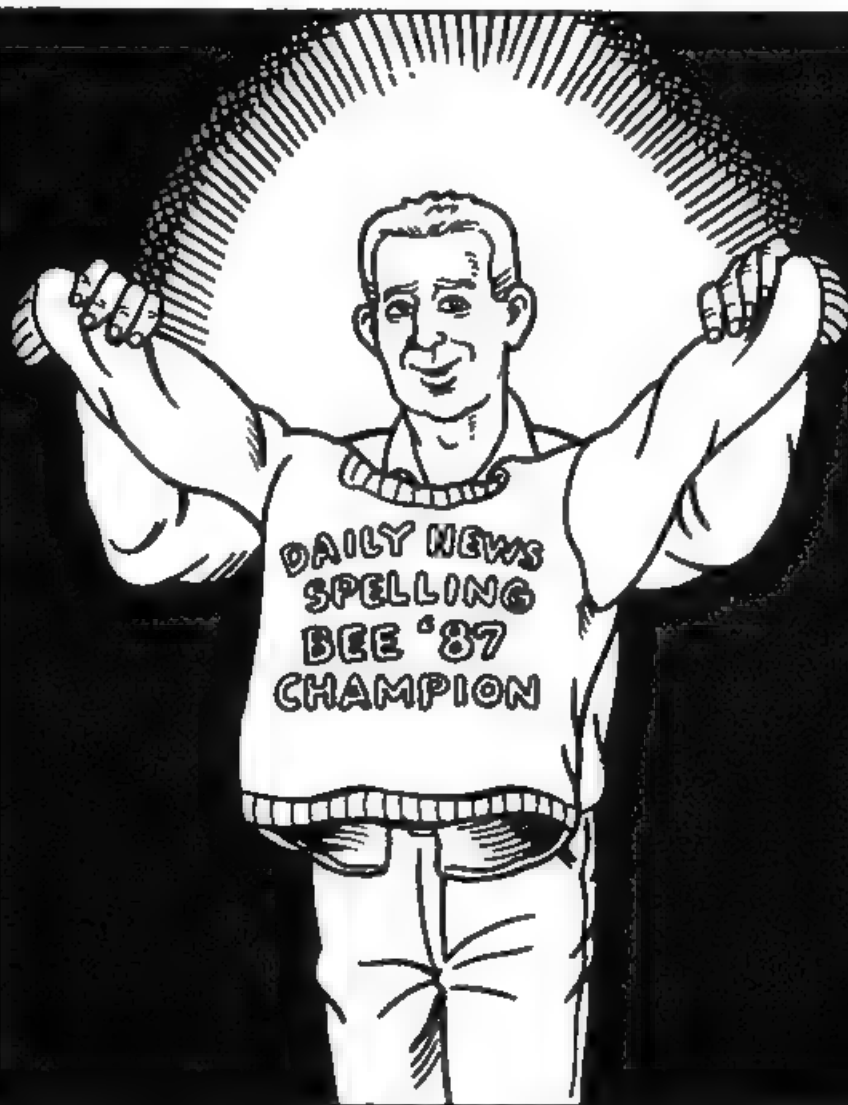
ONE BY ONE THE KIDS WERE PICKED OFF, UNTIL IT WAS JUST ME AND A GIRL. I MISSED A WORD, I FORGET WHICH, AND THEN SHE SPELLED IT RIGHT.

IF SHE SPELLED THE NEXT WORD SHE WOULD WIN, BUT LUCKILY SHE SPELLED "EXISTENCE" WITH AN "A." I SPELLED IT RIGHT AND SPELLED "LABORATORY" RIGHT TO WIN. MY DAD WAS VERY PROUD. WE WERE WALKING OUT ONTO THE STREET AND SOMEONE STOPPED ME TO ASK WHO WON THE SPELLING BEE...

I DID!

...I CHIRPED. THEY THOUGHT I WAS KIDDING OR CRAZY OR BOTH. I WAS THE FIRST KID FROM MY SCHOOL EVER TO WIN THE DISTRICT SPELLING BEE. SO PS 312 HAD A DAY IN MY HONOR.

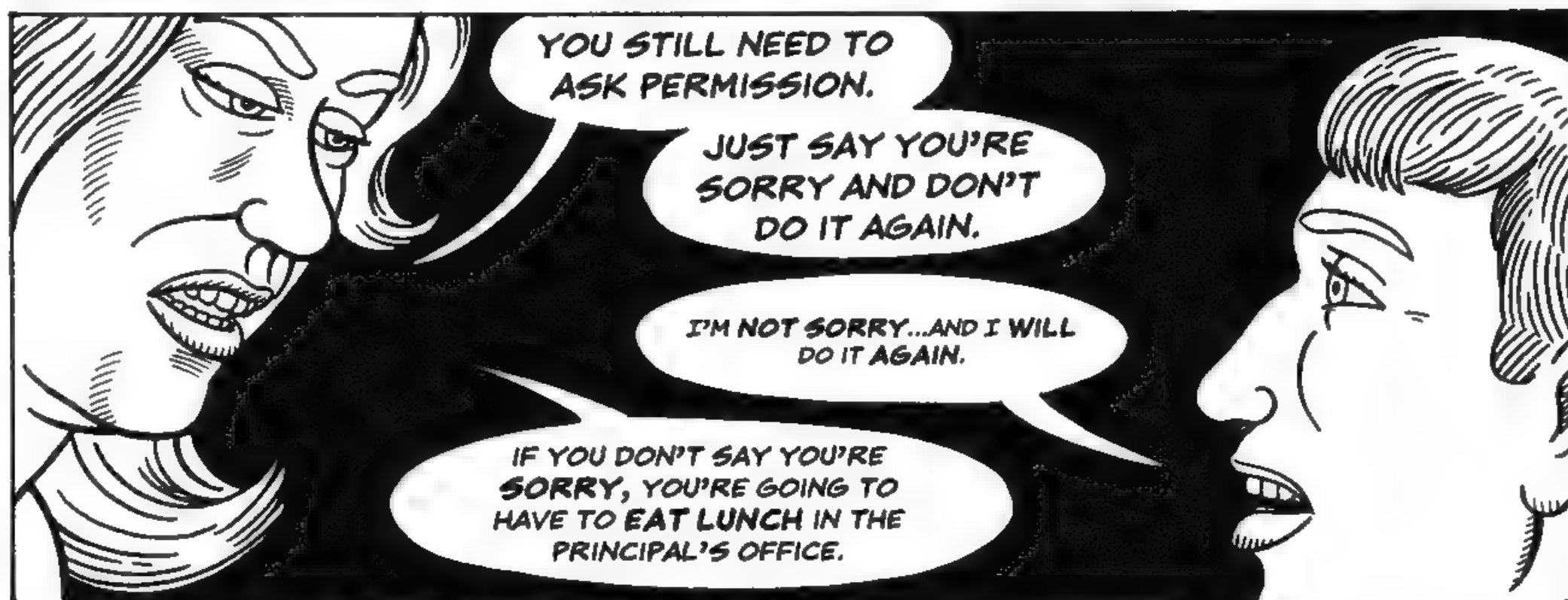
I CAME IN 16TH IN THE CITYWIDE SPELLING BEE, MISPELLING "ALCOGEL," BUT I WAS FIRST IN BROOKLYN THAT YEAR. I WON AN ALMANAC AND A JACKET. THE ALMANAC GOT DESTROYED, BUT THE JACKET FITS ME NOW. I STILL HAVE IT...IT'S THE KITSCHIEST THING I OWN.



DURING THIS TIME A DOCTOR FOUND THAT MY LIVER WAS SIGNIFICANTLY ENLARGED FOR SOME REASON. SHE PUT ME ON A LOW FAT DIET, AND I HAD TO DRINK MYLANTA BEFORE MY MEALS. BOY, THAT DELICIOUS CHALKY TASTE WAS ENOUGH TO MAKE ME WANT TO JUMP OUT OF A WINDOW.

I ALSO HAD TO EAT AT SPECIFIC TIMES.





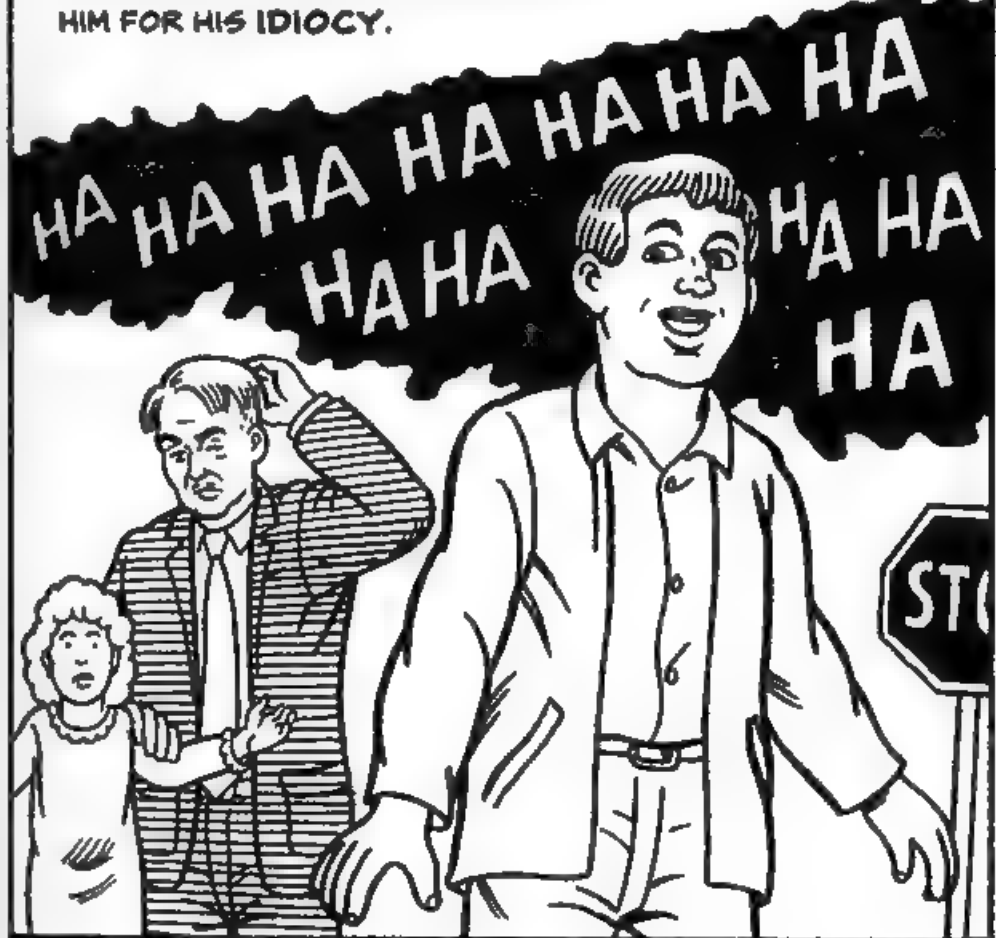
ANOTHER TIME I WAS HAVING AN ARGUMENT WITH THIS GIRL, BONNIE. WE STARTED CALLING EACH OTHER NAMES, KID STUFF. SHE SAID THAT SHE WAS GOING TO TELL HER DAD ON ME, AND THAT HE WAS A COP. I TOLD HER TO GO RIGHT AHEAD, THAT SHE HAD STARTED IT (WHICH IS TRUE).



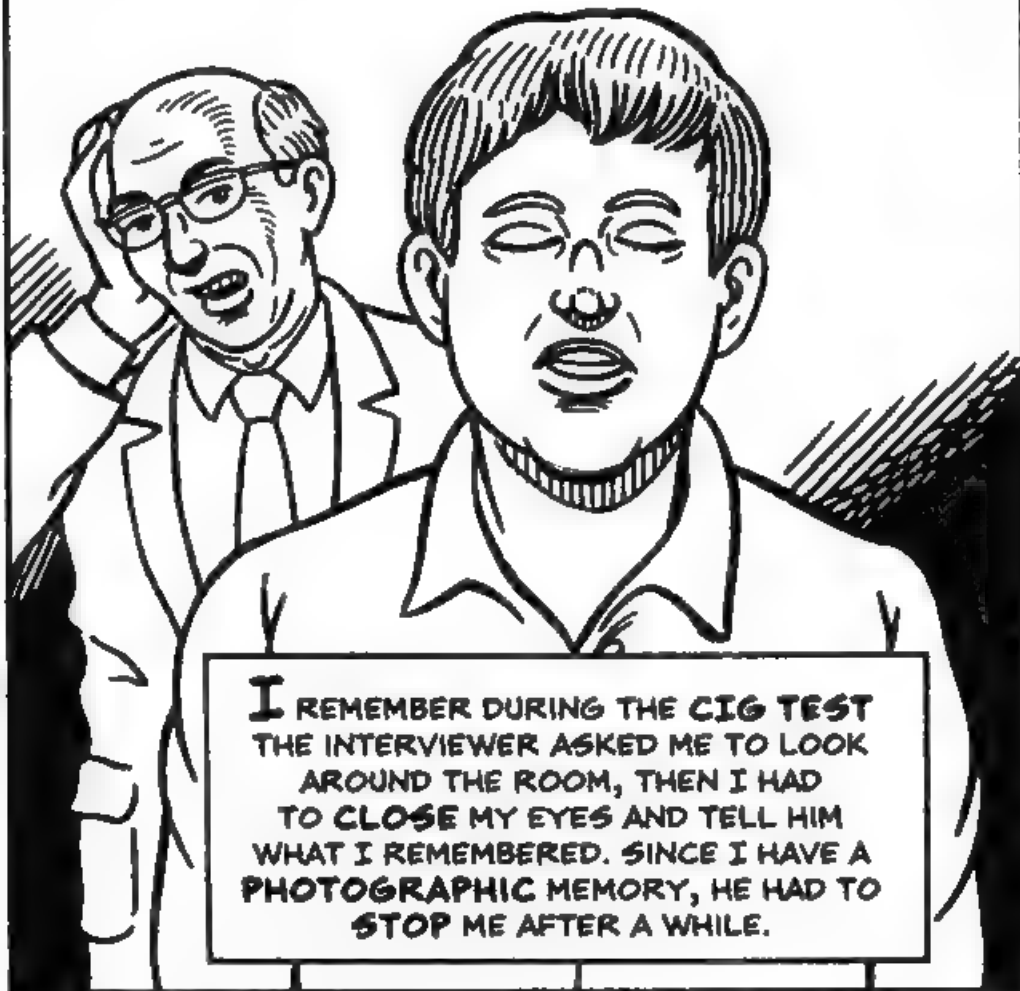
SO WHEN I LEFT SCHOOL THAT DAY I SAW HER DAD GRABBING KIDS AND ASKING BONNIE, "IS THIS HIM?" THEN HE GRABBED ME BY THE JACKET. HE TOLD ME I SHOULDN'T HAVE STARTED WITH HIS DAUGHTER. I ANSWERED, "I DIDN'T. SHE STARTED IT."



THE MAN HAD ME BY THE COLLAR, BUT I KNEW HE WAS BLUFFING, THAT PEOPLE DON'T GET ARRESTED FOR NAME-CALLING. SO I LAUGHED IN HIS FACE. I FORCED MYSELF TO KEEP LAUGHING, BECAUSE I KNEW THAT WAS THE MOST HUMILIATING THING I COULD DO. "WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO ARREST ME FOR?" I ASKED HIM (OR "LET ME SEE YOUR BADGE," I DON'T REMEMBER WHICH.) HE MUMBLED SOME THREAT AND WALKED OFF. I WAS SO EXTREMELY PROUD OF MYSELF. HERE I WAS, 10 YEARS OLD, AND I WASN'T LETTING SOME COP BULLY ME. AND I HAD THE PRESENCE OF MIND TO DENIGRATE HIM FOR HIS IDIOCY.



THERE WERE TWO PROGRAMS FOR GIFTED KIDS IN OUR DISTRICT. THE FIRST WAS THE MAGNET PROGRAM, WHERE YOU JUST TOOK A REGULAR TEST. THE SECOND WAS FOR A BRAND NEW PROGRAM CALLED CIG (CENTER FOR THE INTELLECTUALLY GIFTED), WHICH WAS MUCH MORE SELECTIVE. THERE WAS A WRITTEN TEST AND AN INTERVIEW. IN NEITHER OF THESE PROGRAMS DID GRADES MAKE A DIFFERENCE WITH REGARD TO ADMISSION. ANYWAY, I ACED BOTH.

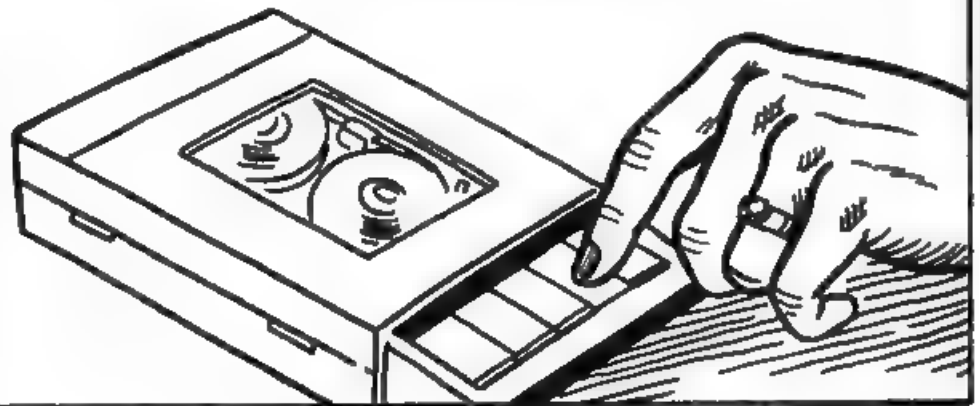


I REMEMBER DURING THE CIG TEST THE INTERVIEWER ASKED ME TO LOOK AROUND THE ROOM, THEN I HAD TO CLOSE MY EYES AND TELL HIM WHAT I REMEMBERED. SINCE I HAVE A PHOTOGRAPHIC MEMORY, HE HAD TO STOP ME AFTER A WHILE.

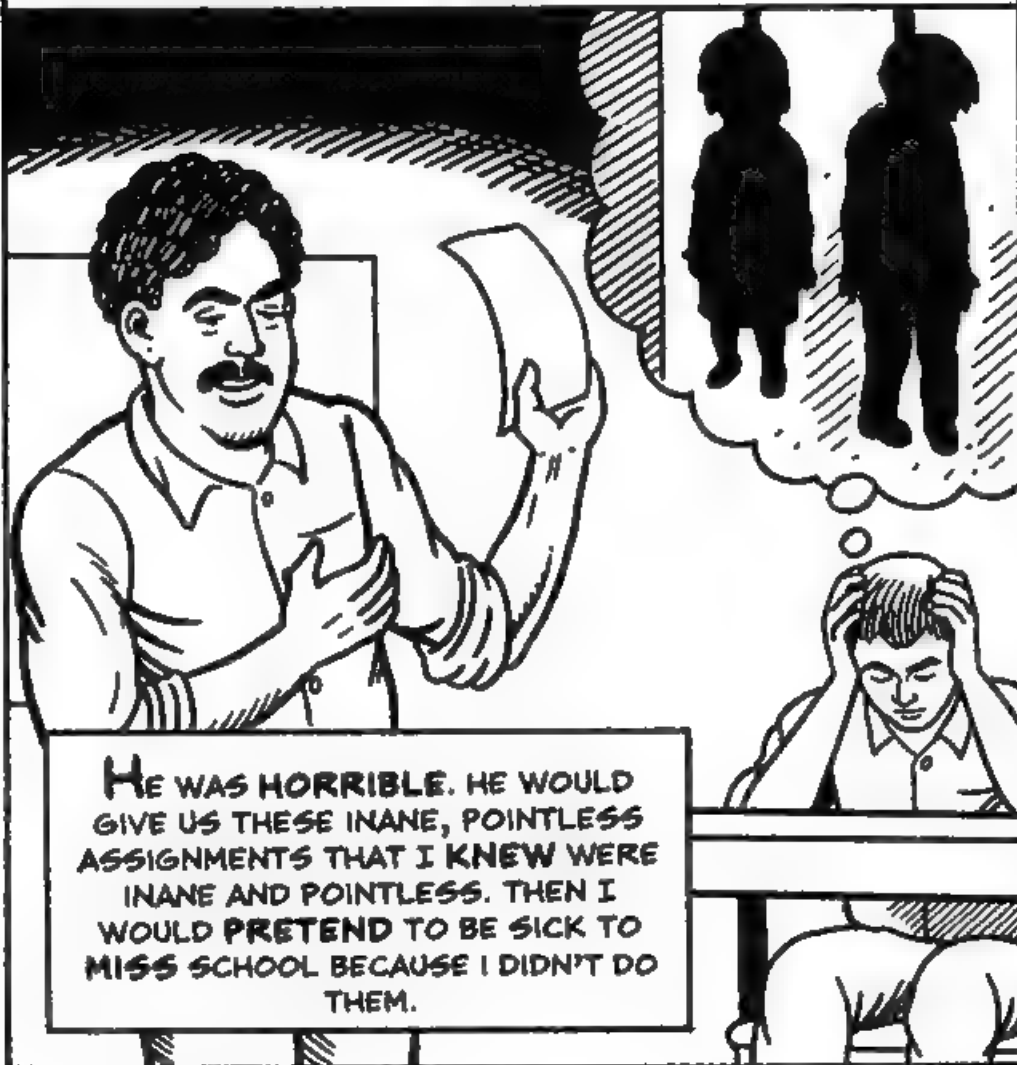
I WAS VALEDICTORIAN AND HAD TO MEMORIZE KIPLING'S "IF" DURING THE GRADUATION. THE KIDS AND THE GUY WHO RAN THE GRADUATION PRACTICE KEPT CALLING ME "RUDYARD," AND I THOUGHT THAT WAS REALLY LAME, BUT I COULDN'T SAY ANYTHING BECAUSE IT WOULD



MAKE IT SEEM LIKE I WAS SENSITIVE. I BROUGHT A TAPE RECORDER AND TAPED THE CEREMONY. MY MOM TAPED OVER IT SHORTLY THEREAFTER FOR SOME RELAXATION SELF-HYPNOSIS. SINCE IT WASN'T ONE OF HER TAPES, IT MIGHT AS WELL HAVE BEEN BLANK FOR ALL SHE CARED.



I DON'T THINK ANYONE HAS A GOOD TIME IN JUNIOR HIGH, BUT I CAN'T COMPLAIN TOO MUCH. IN THE CIG PROGRAM WE HAD THE SAME KIDS IN THE CLASS EVERY YEAR, PLUS WE HAD THE SAME TEACHERS FOR THREE YEARS. THERE WAS THIS ONE TEACHER I HAD, MR. SLIDELSKY, WHO DROVE ME INSANE. I LITERALLY USED TO FANTASIZE ABOUT KILLING HIS CHILDREN (I FIGURED I COULDN'T TAKE HIM OUT).

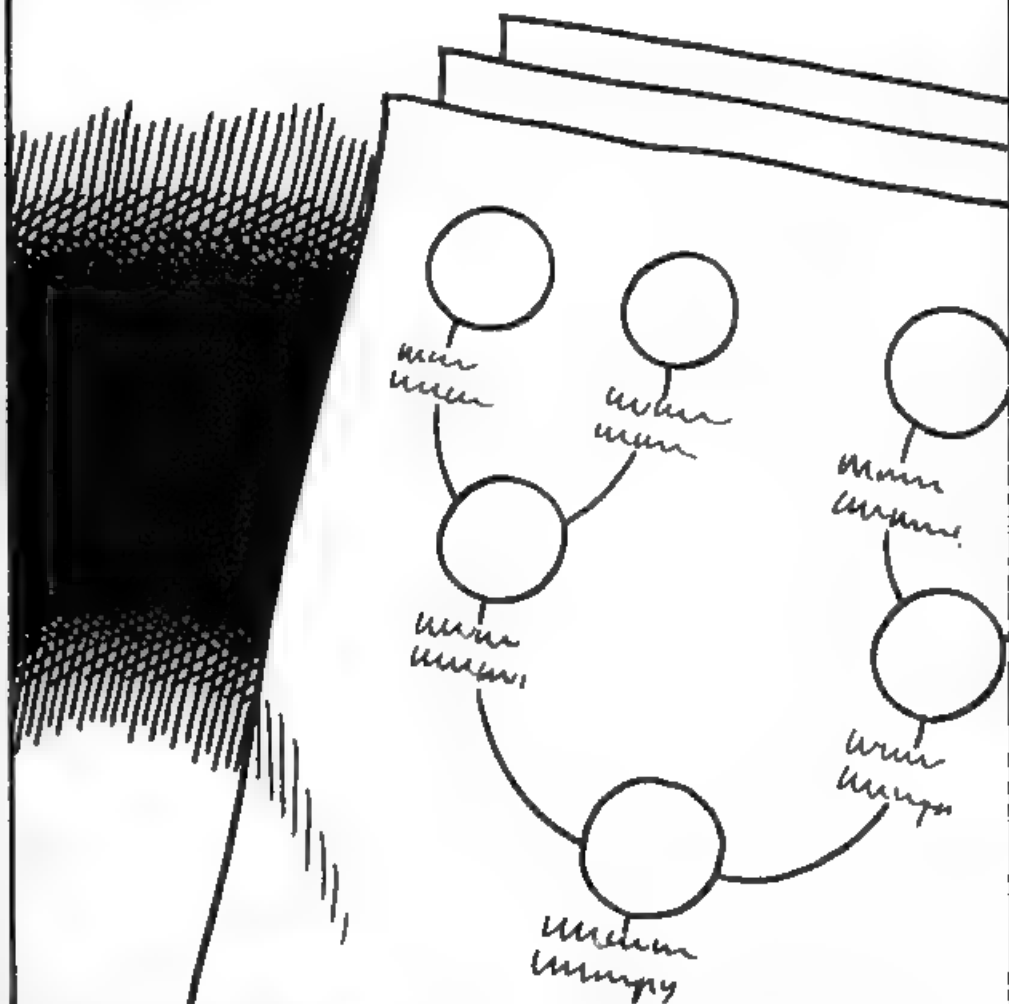


HE WAS HORRIBLE. HE WOULD GIVE US THESE INANE, POINTLESS ASSIGNMENTS THAT I KNEW WERE INANE AND POINTLESS. THEN I WOULD PRETEND TO BE SICK TO MISS SCHOOL BECAUSE I DIDN'T DO THEM.

ONE WAS IDENTIFYING THE PEOPLE THAT THE DESPICABLE BILLY JOEL NAMECHECKED IN THAT ABORTION OF A SONG, "WE DIDN'T START THE FIRE."



ANOTHER TIME WE HAD TO DO A 3-5 PAGE PAPER ABOUT OUR FAMILY HISTORY. NOW MY PARENTS WERE ONLY CHILDREN AND MY PATERNAL GRANDPARENTS HAD ONE LIVING SIBLING BETWEEN THEM. I REALLY WASN'T INTERESTED IN TALKING TO MY FAMILY ABOUT OUR HISTORY, NOR DID I SEE HOW IT WAS HIS BUSINESS EITHER! MY PAPER WAS VERY SHORT.

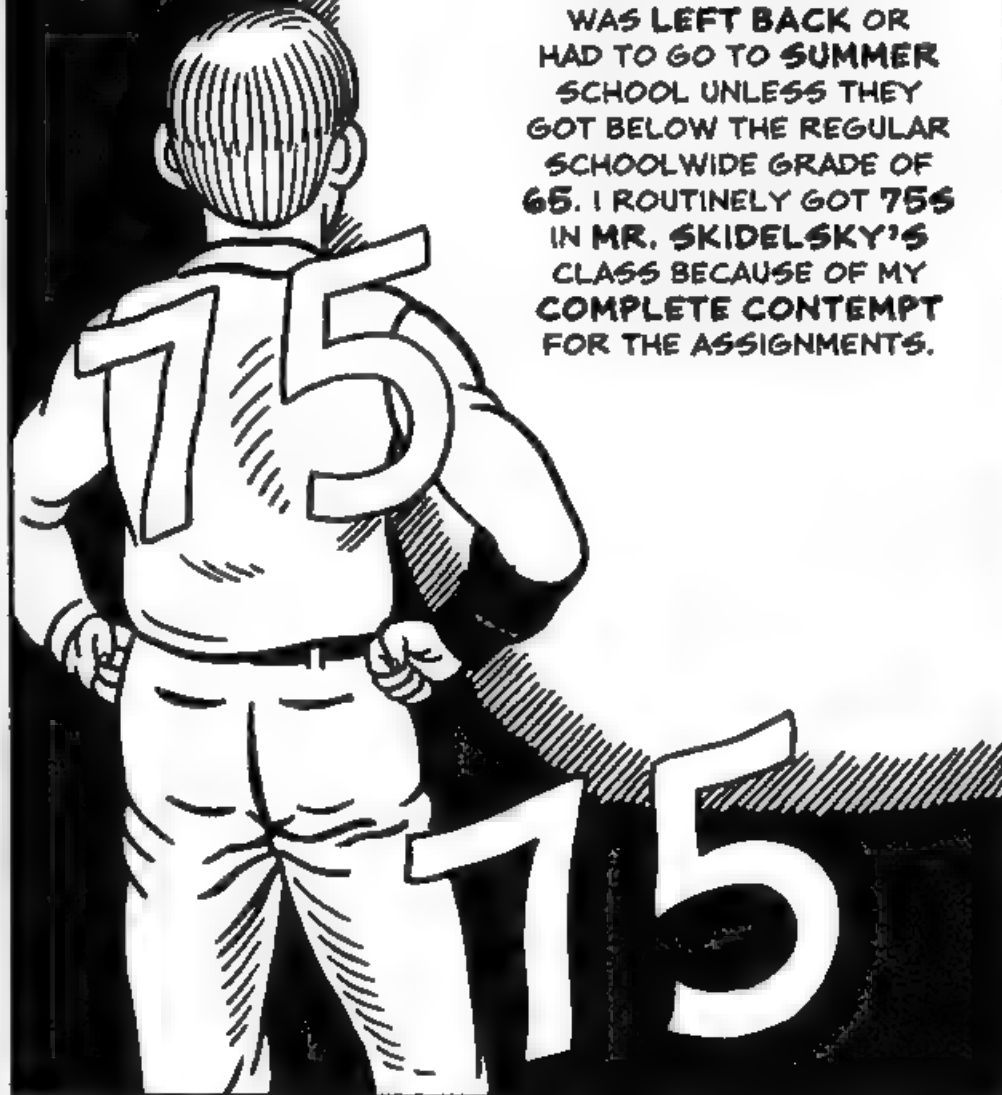


THEN HE TOLD US THAT HE MARKED DOWN THE SHORTER PAPERS, BECAUSE MARGARET KELLY, WHOSE IRISH FAMILY HAD 40 PEOPLE, HANDED IN A FORTY PAGE PAPER.



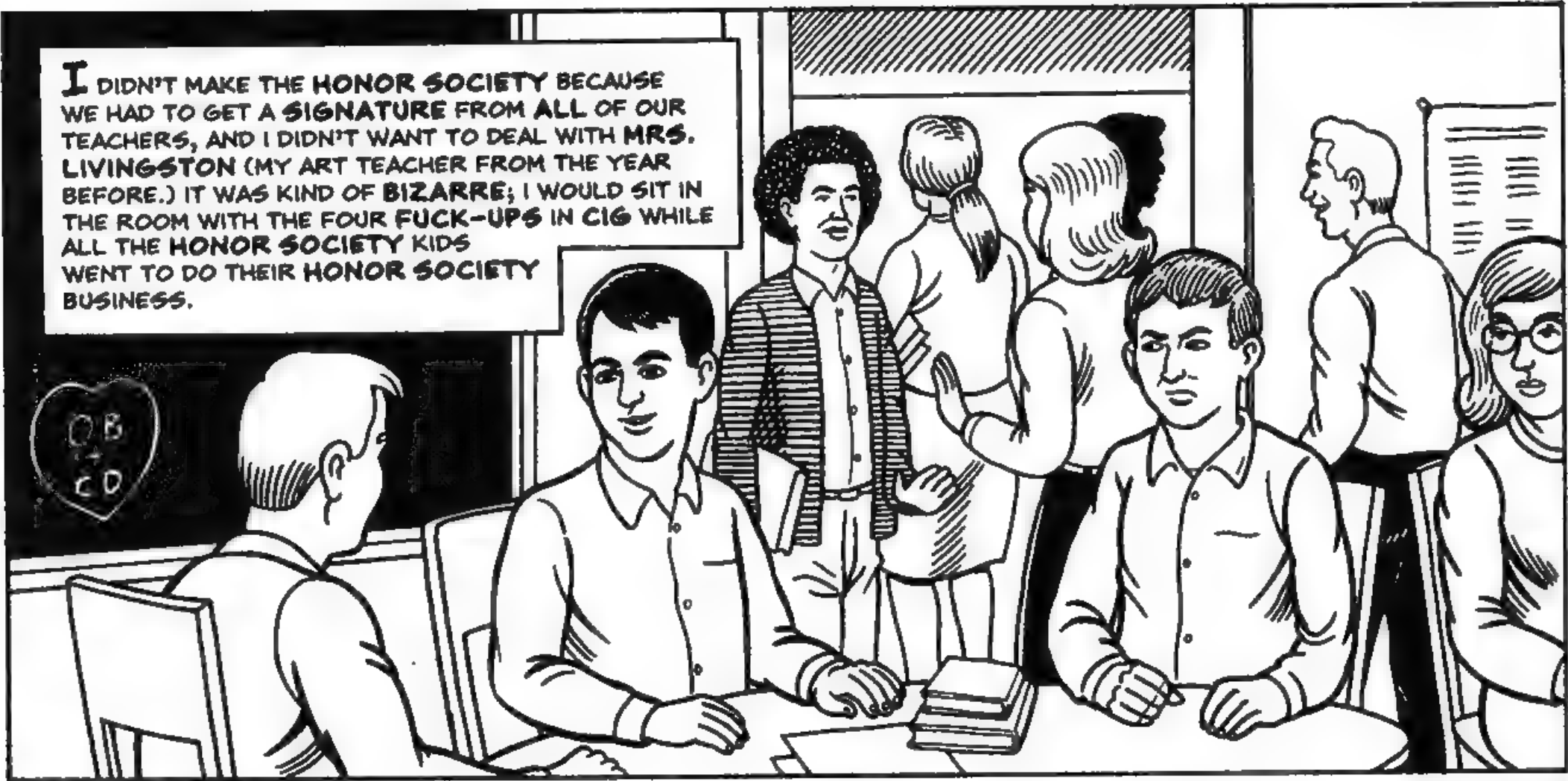
75

I WAS BESIDE MYSELF WITH ANGER AT THE MAN. IN GIG ANYTHING BELOW AN 80 WAS CALLED FAILING ALTHOUGH THAT MADE ABSOLUTELY NO SENSE SINCE NO ONE WAS LEFT BACK OR HAD TO GO TO SUMMER SCHOOL UNLESS THEY GOT BELOW THE REGULAR SCHOOLWIDE GRADE OF 65. I ROUTINELY GOT 75s IN MR. SKIDELSKY'S CLASS BECAUSE OF MY COMPLETE CONTEMPT FOR THE ASSIGNMENTS.



MY DAD ONCE GOT SO ENRAGED THAT HE KICKED MY NINTENDO DOWNSTAIRS. HE ALWAYS TOLD ME THAT I SHOULD BE GETTING BETTER GRADES, STUDYING MORE AND DOING MY HOMEWORK, AND YET HE COULD NEVER GIVE ME A REASON WHY. I JUST THOUGHT OF HIM AS AN OVERLY ANGRY LUNATIC AND RESENTED THE POWER HE HAD OVER ME BECAUSE HE DID NOTHING TO JUSTIFY THAT POWER OVER ME. WHAT A DICK!

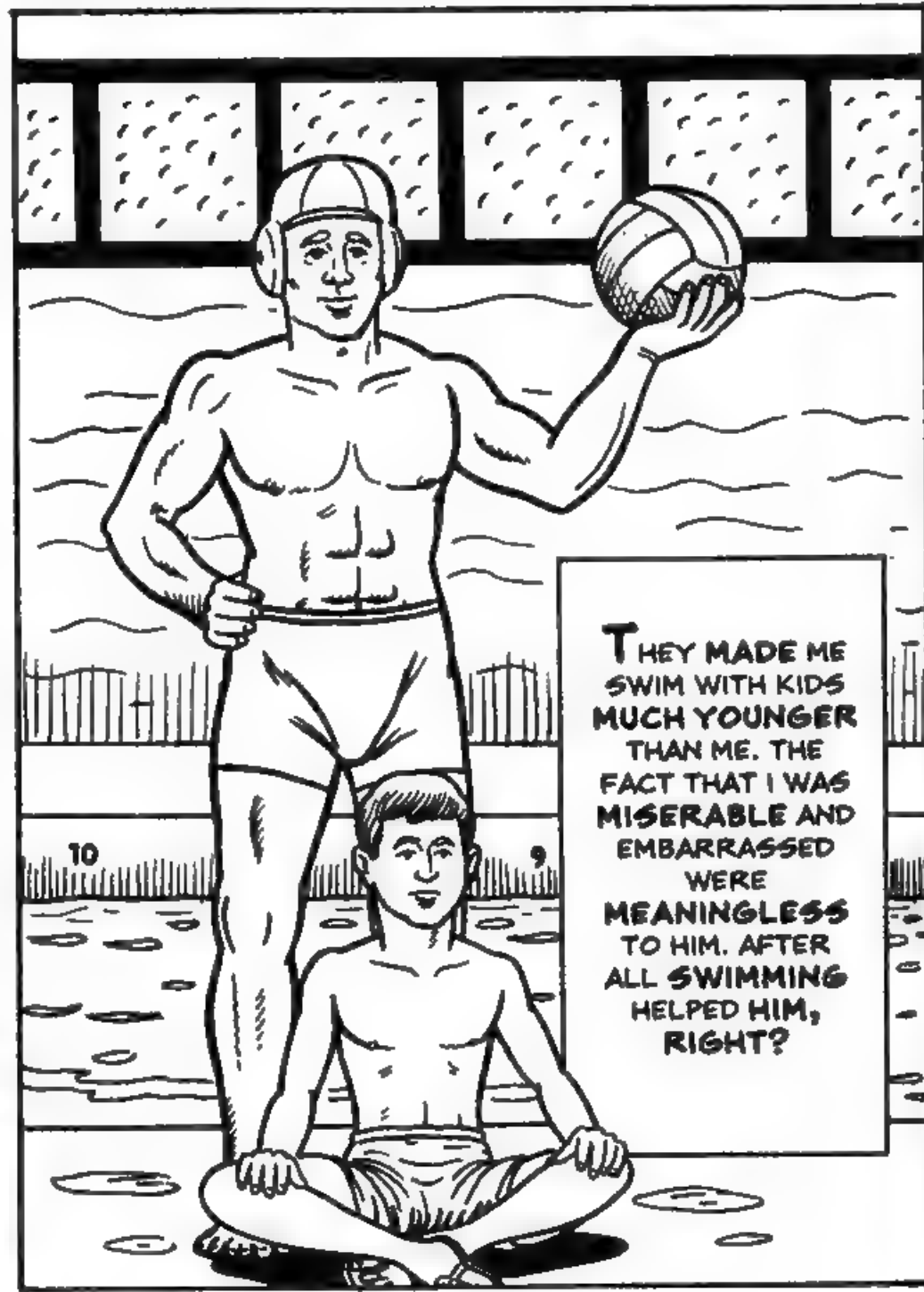
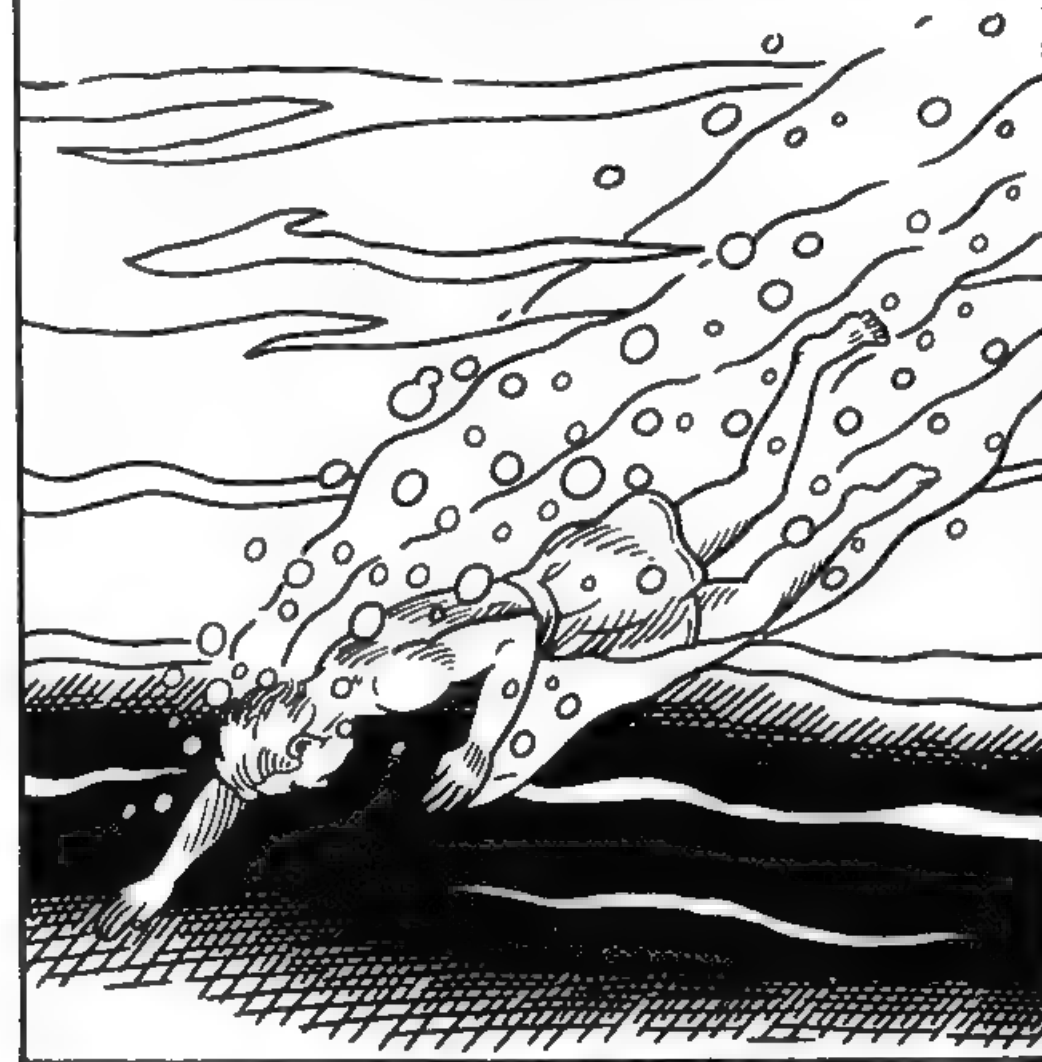
I DIDN'T MAKE THE HONOR SOCIETY BECAUSE WE HAD TO GET A SIGNATURE FROM ALL OF OUR TEACHERS, AND I DIDN'T WANT TO DEAL WITH MRS. LIVINGSTON (MY ART TEACHER FROM THE YEAR BEFORE.) IT WAS KIND OF BIZARRE; I WOULD SIT IN THE ROOM WITH THE FOUR FUCK-UPS IN CIG WHILE ALL THE HONOR SOCIETY KIDS WENT TO DO THEIR HONOR SOCIETY BUSINESS.



ALL THE TEACHERS WERE REALLY CONFUSED AS TO WHY I DIDN'T APPLY, SINCE EVERYONE ELSE DID, BUT I DIDN'T GIVE A CRAP FOR PHONY ACCOLADES.



DURING THIS TIME MY DAD DECIDED I HAD TOO MUCH SPARE TIME, SO HE WOULD MAKE ME DO THINGS THAT I ABSOLUTELY HATED. WHEN HE WAS YOUNG MY FATHER WAS THE FAT KID IN HIS SCHOOL, JUST MORBIDLY OBESE. THEN HE STARTED PLAYING WATER POLO IN HIGH SCHOOL AND GOT INTO SHAPE. ERGO, I SHOULD SWIM THREE TIMES A WEEK AFTER SCHOOL. THIS WAS THE EXTENT OF HIS LOGIC. I WAS HORRIBLE AT IT.

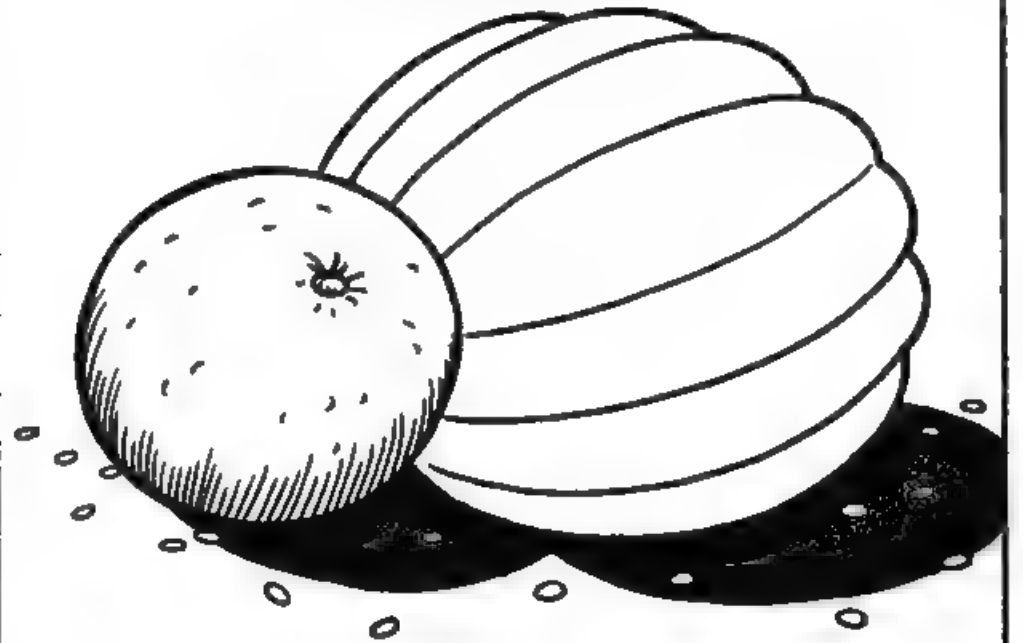


THEY MADE ME SWIM WITH KIDS MUCH YOUNGER THAN ME. THE FACT THAT I WAS MISERABLE AND EMBARRASSED WERE MEANINGLESS TO HIM. AFTER ALL SWIMMING HELPED HIM, RIGHT?

I REMEMBER
ONCE I
ACCIDENTALLY
BROUGHT \$20
TO THE LOCKER
ROOM. I ASKED
HIM TO PUT IT IN
HIS LOCKER
SINCE HE HAD
A LOCK, BUT
HE SAID IT WAS
LOCKED ALREADY.
SURE ENOUGH
SOMEONE STOLE
IT WHILE WE
WERE SWIMMING.
HE TOLD ME I
SHOULDN'T HAVE
BROUGHT MONEY
TO THE POOL
BECAUSE PEOPLE
STEAL FROM
LOCKERS.



MY DAD ALSO THOUGHT IT WAS IMPORTANT FOR ME
TO KEEP IN TOUCH WITH JEWISH CULTURE. THIS WAS
A POINT OF PRIDE FOR HIM, SINCE HE GREW UP WITH
BLATANT ANTI-SEMITISM IN RUSSIA. SO HE MADE
ME STUDY TALMUD ON SUNDAYS. TALMUD STUDY
IS VERY EXACTING SO I HAD TO GO OVER THE SAME
PASSAGE FOR WEEKS UNTIL I GOT IT PERFECT BEFORE
I COULD MOVE ON.



IT WASN'T EVEN IN HEBREW, WHICH I HAD FORGOTTEN,
BUT IN ARAMAIC, AND IT CONCERNED THE MORALITY
OF PICKING UP FRUIT THAT SOMEONE DROPPED. AFTER
MONTHS I HAD LEARNED TWO PAGES THAT COVERED
THREE CASES: ORANGES DROPPED IN A 10' BY 10'
AREA, POMEGRANATES, WHICH WERE LARGE BUT
CHEAP, AND SESAME SEEDS, WHICH WERE SMALL
BUT VERY EXPENSIVE. IT WAS LIKE BANGING MY HEAD
AGAINST A WALL TRYING TO GET HIM TO STOP
DRAGGING ME TO THIS TUTOR.

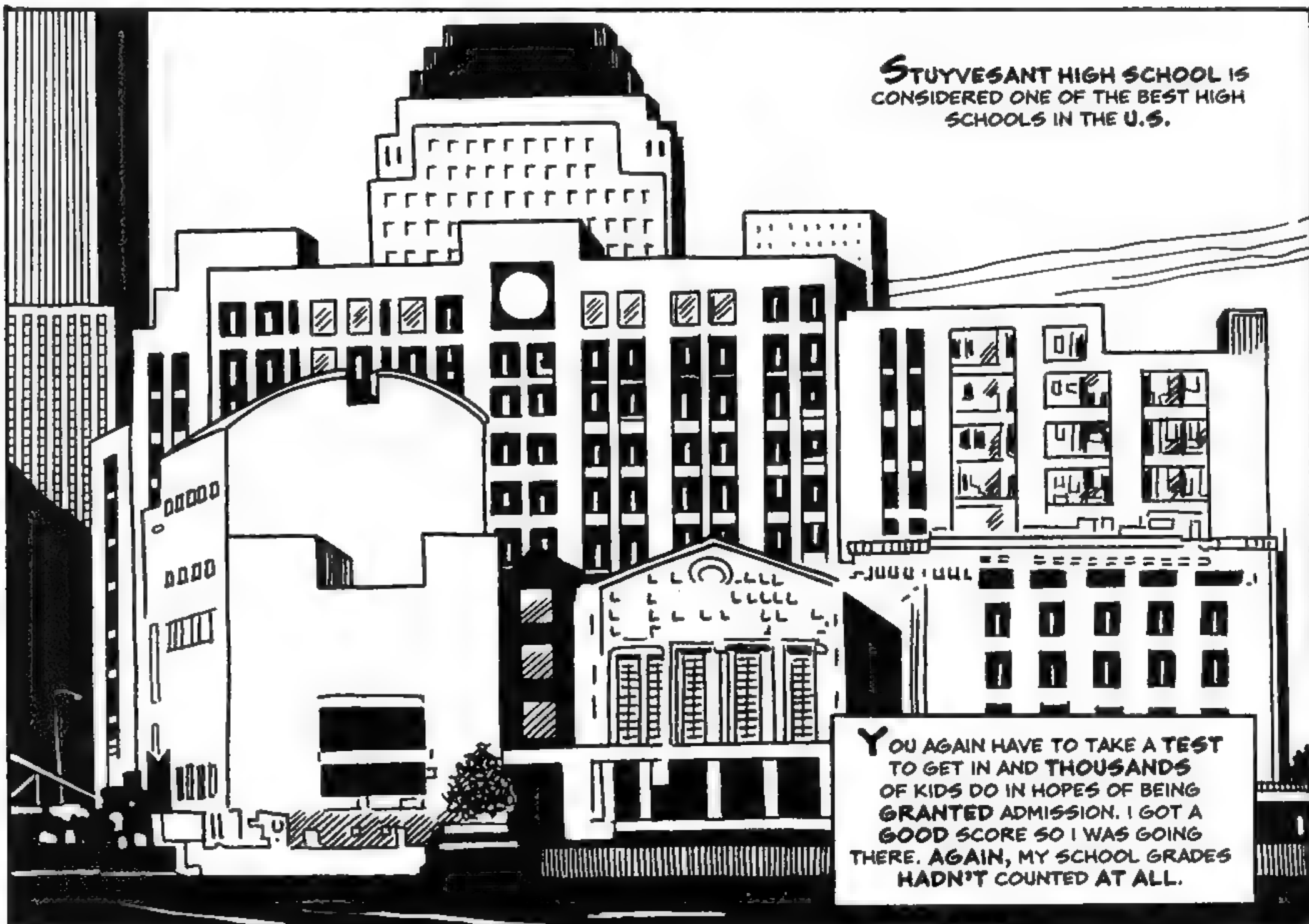
MY DAD ALSO LIKED TO BE LIKED, AND TO DO FAVORS
FOR OTHER PEOPLE FOR NO REASON AT ALL. I USED
TO GO TO SCHOOL EARLY AND HANG OUT WITH THE
FRENCH TEACHER AND HELP HER OUT. MY DAD WOULD
DRIVE THIS KID WHO LIVED NEAR TO ME TO SCHOOL
EVEN THOUGH WE BOTH THOUGHT OF HIM AS A COMPLETE
NERD. HE WAS NASTY AND BOORISH, TOO. THEN HE
WOULD HANG AROUND WITH ME ALL MORNING AT
SCHOOL.



MY DAD NEVER GAVE ME A REASON AND WHEN I
EXPLAINED TO HIM HOW MUCH THIS BOTHERED ME IT
WAS LIKE I WAS TALKING TO A PARROT. EXCEPT THAT
PARROTS EVENTUALLY GET YOUR POINT: WHY HE WOULD
DO A FAVOR FOR A COMPLETE STRANGER WHEN IT
CAUSES HIS SON GRIEF IS SOMETHING HE WOULDN'T
BOTHRER TO EXPLAIN.

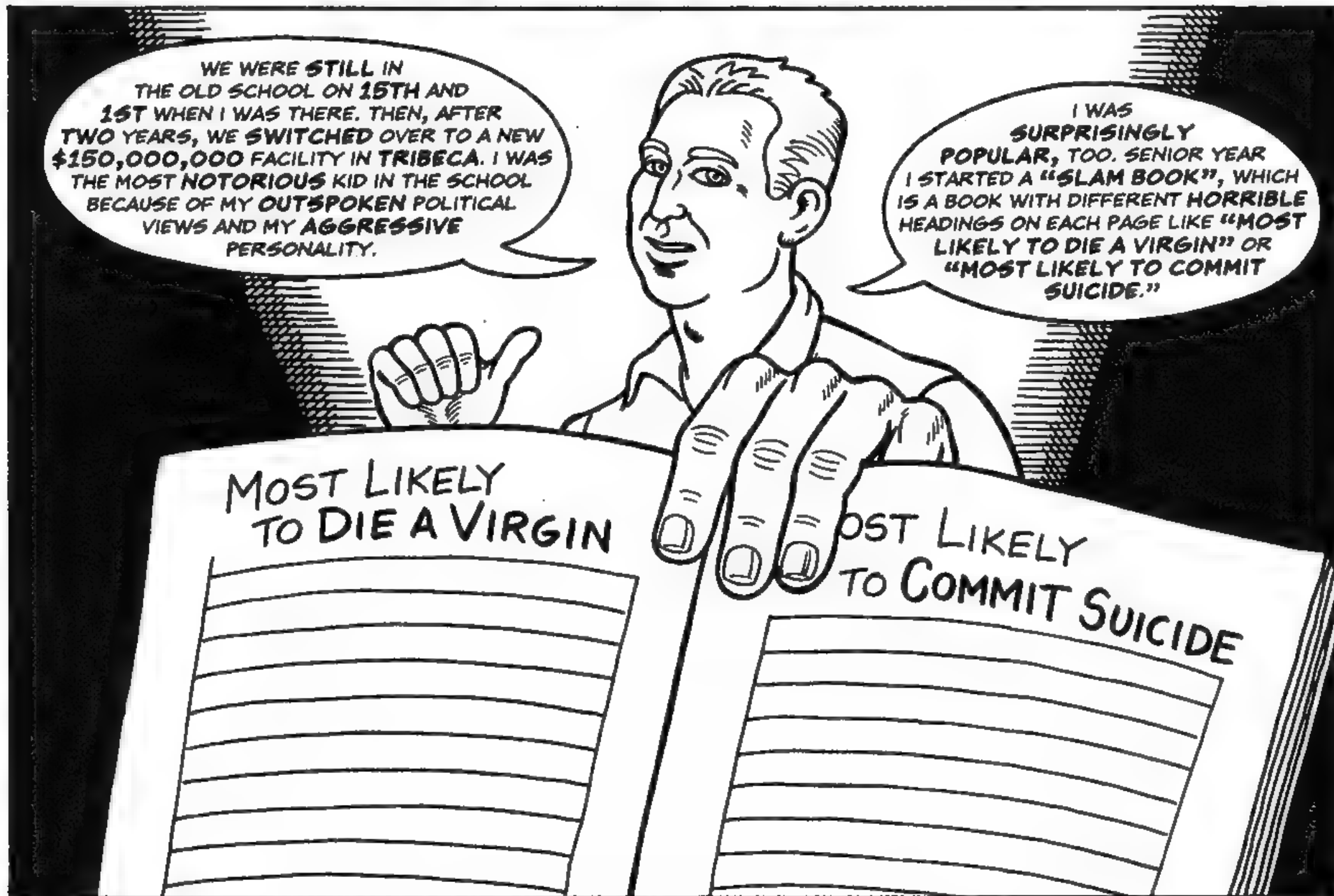
EVEN IN CIG I WAS THE SMARTEST KID (WELL,
SECOND AFTER THIS GIRL DINAH). WHEN I GOT BORED
I WOULD TALK IN CLASS. I WAS DISTRACTING THE GUY
NEXT TO ME SO MUCH IN MATH CLASS THAT MY TEACHER
GAVE ME THE HIGH SCHOOL TEXTBOOK AND TOLD ME TO
LEARN IT AND IGNORE HER LESSONS.





STUYVESANT HIGH SCHOOL IS CONSIDERED ONE OF THE BEST HIGH SCHOOLS IN THE U.S.

YOU AGAIN HAVE TO TAKE A TEST TO GET IN AND THOUSANDS OF KIDS DO IN HOPES OF BEING GRANTED ADMISSION. I GOT A GOOD SCORE SO I WAS GOING THERE. AGAIN, MY SCHOOL GRADES HADN'T COUNTED AT ALL.



WE WERE STILL IN THE OLD SCHOOL ON 15TH AND 1ST WHEN I WAS THERE. THEN, AFTER TWO YEARS, WE SWITCHED OVER TO A NEW \$150,000,000 FACILITY IN TRIBECA. I WAS THE MOST NOTORIOUS KID IN THE SCHOOL BECAUSE OF MY OUTSPOKEN POLITICAL VIEWS AND MY AGGRESSIVE PERSONALITY.

I WAS SURPRISINGLY POPULAR, TOO. SENIOR YEAR I STARTED A "SLAM BOOK", WHICH IS A BOOK WITH DIFFERENT HORRIBLE HEADINGS ON EACH PAGE LIKE "MOST LIKELY TO DIE A VIRGIN" OR "MOST LIKELY TO COMMIT SUICIDE."

**MOST LIKELY
TO DIE A VIRGIN**

**MOST LIKELY
TO COMMIT SUICIDE**

THEN YOU PASS IT AROUND AND EVERYBODY SLAMS EVERYONE ELSE, CRUELLY BECAUSE ANONYMOUSLY. I WON MOST LIKELY TO BE RICH



MOST GEEKY!



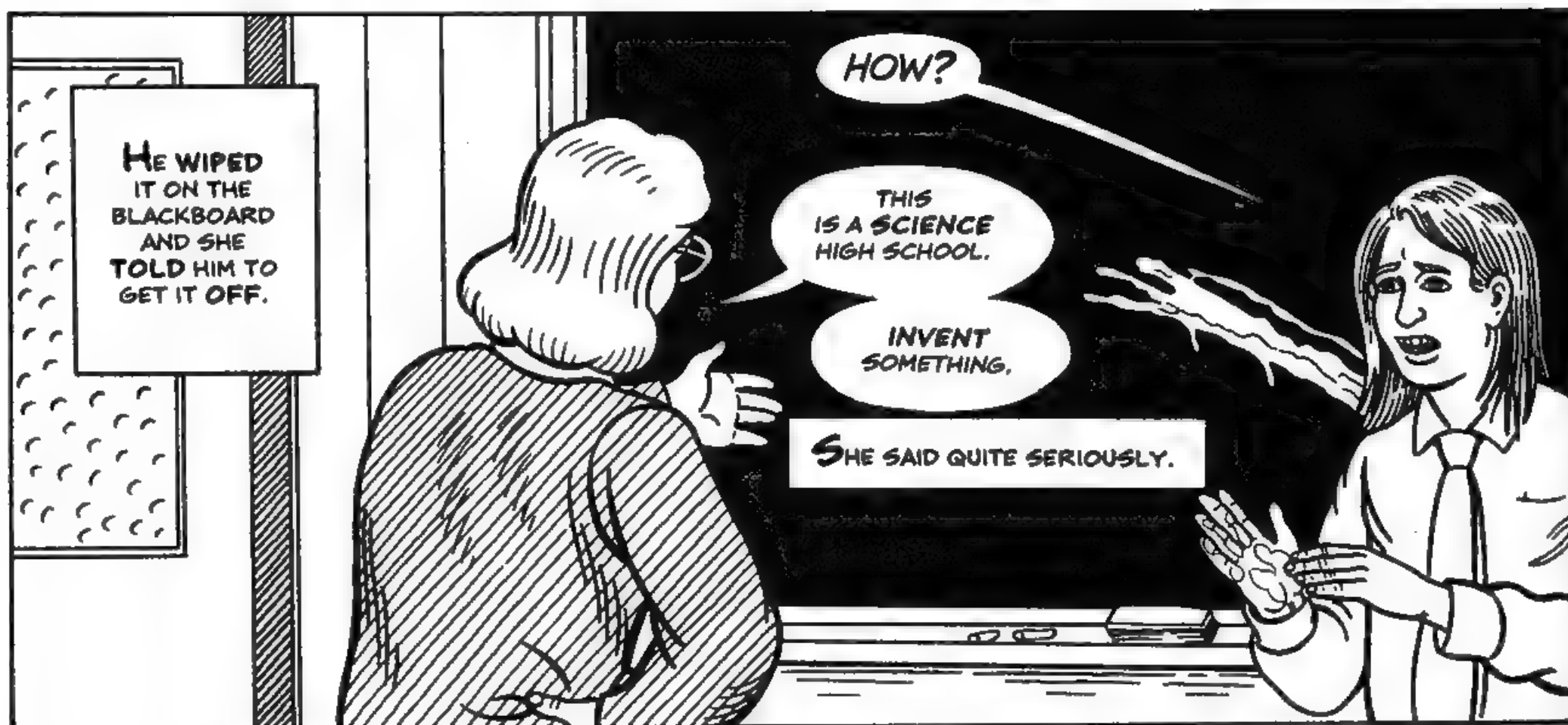
AND MOST EVIL (THE LATTER UNANIMOUSLY). I PLACED IN MOST FUNNY AS WELL.

ONE OF THE TEACHERS WE USED TO TERRORIZE WAS OUR FRENCH TEACHER, MISS LORENZO. THIS IS WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU HAVE A SCHOOL WHERE THE STUDENTS ARE SMARTER THAN THEIR TEACHERS. MISS LORENZO WAS PRETTY OLD AND COMPLETELY CRAZY. SHE HAD GLASSES THAT ONLY HAD ONE EAR HANDLE. SHE JUST NEVER GOT THEM FIXED.



ANYWAY, ONE TIME THIS GUY MIKE POPPED OPEN ONE OF THOSE MALLEABLE STRESS DOLLS AND SOME SORT OF GEL CAME OUT.





SHE WOULD CALL US UP TO THE FRONT TO PUT UP THE HOMEWORK FROM THE NIGHT BEFORE AND DIVIDE THE BOARD INTO SECTIONS, LIKE QUESTIONS 1-3 IN SECTION 1 AND QUESTIONS 4-6 IN SECTION 2. SO I WOULD VOLUNTEER TO DO THE LAST SECTION AND THEN I WOULD ADD ANOTHER NUMBER AND WRITE SOME RIDICULOUS ANSWER.

THE ONLY ONE I REMEMBER WAS I ONCE WROTE:

*J'ai manger la tete de
ma mere morte avec la laitue*

WHICH MEANS "I ATE THE HEAD OF MY DEAD MOTHER WITH SOME LETTUCE." SHE WOULD LOOK AT THE BOARD, START TO READ IT THEN LOOK AT THE BOOK AND WOULD BE TOTALLY CONFUSED. THE CLASS WOULD BE ROARING.

I CAME HOME ONE DAY FROM SCHOOL TO FIND MY MOM AND GRANDMOTHER IN HYSTERICS, CRYING ON THE SOFA. I THOUGHT MY GRANDFATHER HAD DIED.

SOB...

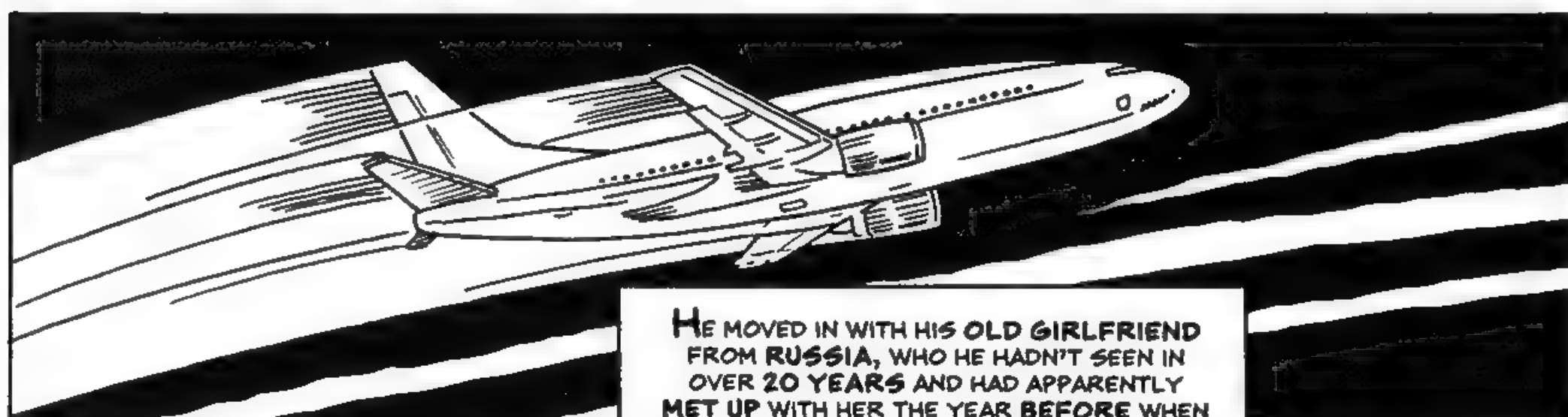
AAAHN,
A-HUCK,
A-HUCK...

I WAS EXTREMELY UNCOMFORTABLE BY THIS DISPLAY OF EMOTION AND ASKED THEM WHAT WAS WRONG.

YOUR
FATHER TOLD YOUR MOTHER
HE WANTS A DIVORCE.

PROMISE
ME THAT
YOU'LL LIVE WITH
YOUR MOTHER.
PROMISE ME!

I PROMISED HER. SHE COULD NEVER KEEP HER NOSE OUT OF ANYONE'S BUSINESS. PEOPLE ALWAYS SAY THAT SHE'S JUST BEING A JEWISH GRANDMOTHER, BUT THAT'S JUST EXCUSING HER DISGUSTING BEHAVIOR.



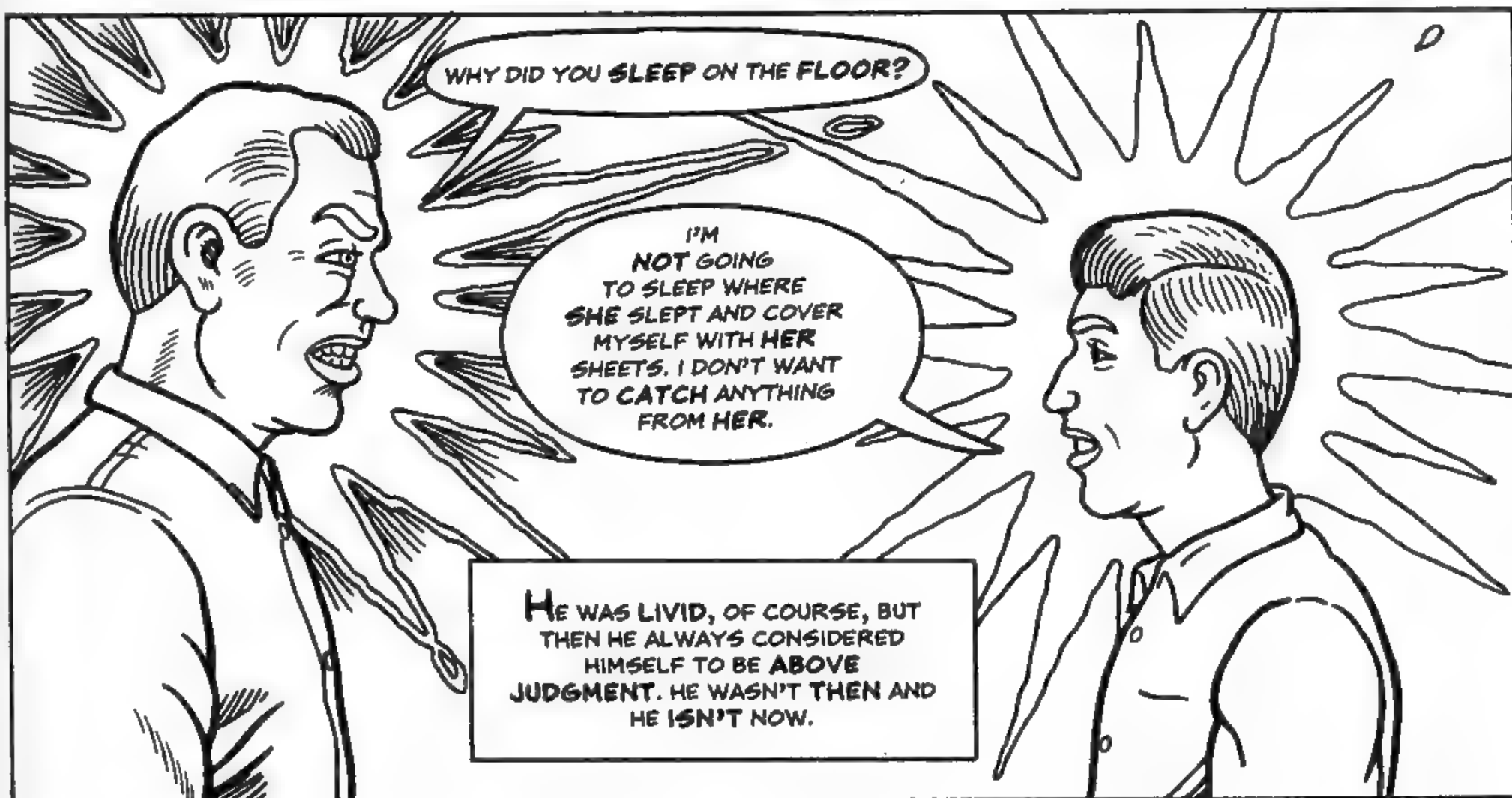
HE MOVED IN WITH HIS OLD GIRLFRIEND FROM RUSSIA, WHO HE HADN'T SEEN IN OVER 20 YEARS AND HAD APPARENTLY MET UP WITH HER THE YEAR BEFORE WHEN HE WENT THERE ON A BUSINESS TRIP.



HE PICKED ME UP FOR HIS VISITATION ONE WEEKEND AND, EN ROUTE TO HIS HOUSE, TOLD ME THAT HE WAS LIVING WITH SOMEONE. VERY MATTER OF FACT. HE SAID SHE SLEPT ON A MATTRESS AT HIS PLACE AND GAVE IT TO ME TO SLEEP ON. SHE DIDN'T SPEND THE NIGHT THAT NIGHT.



I SLEPT ON THE FLOOR WITHOUT A BLANKET.



WHY DID YOU SLEEP ON THE FLOOR?

I'M NOT GOING TO SLEEP WHERE SHE SLEPT AND COVER MYSELF WITH HER SHEETS. I DON'T WANT TO CATCH ANYTHING FROM HER.

HE WAS LIVID, OF COURSE, BUT THEN HE ALWAYS CONSIDERED HIMSELF TO BE ABOVE JUDGMENT. HE WASN'T THEN AND HE ISN'T NOW.

AFTER A WHILE WE MOVED TO BRIGHTON BEACH, WHICH WAS A BLOCK AWAY FROM WHERE MY GRANDPARENTS WERE LIVING. BRIGHTON IS A RUSSIAN COMMUNITY WHERE ALL THE SIGNS ARE IN RUSSIAN. I COULDN'T READ OR WRITE THE LANGUAGE, BUT I SPOKE IT FLUENTLY.



ONE OF THE THINGS THAT DROVE ME CRAZY WAS THE RUSSIAN STYLE OF JOKE-TELLING, OR ANECDOTES AS THE RUSSIANS CALLED THEM. WHAT HAPPENS IS THAT THESE LITTLE STORIES MADE THE ROUNDS OF BRIGHTON AND GOD KNOWS WHERE ELSE. BRIGHTON IS REALLY A COMMUNITY WHERE EVERYBODY KNOWS EVERYBODY ELSE, OR AT LEAST KNOWS SOMEONE WHO KNOWS THEM. SO SOMEONE THINKS OF THESE ANECDOTES AND PRETTY SOON EVERYONE IS TELLING THEM TO EACH OTHER.





HERE'S ONE EXAMPLE OF HOW AWFUL THIS ALLEGED HUMOR IS: VLADIMIR AND ALEXEI WERE STANDING IN RED SQUARE; THEY SAW THEIR FRIEND SERGEI UP ON A LEDGE ABOUT TO JUMP...

THIS IS HORRIBLE...

...HE JUST GOT A PROMOTION AT THE INSTITUTE. WHY IS HE SO UPSET?

YOU'RE RIGHT.

AND HIS WIFE HAD A BEAUTIFUL BABY BOY NOT THREE MONTHS AGO. SURELY HE WILL COME TO HIS SENSES.



LET'S NOT FORGET HIS OTHER CHILDREN, WHO HE IS SO PROUD OF AND WHO LOVE HIM SO VERY MUCH.



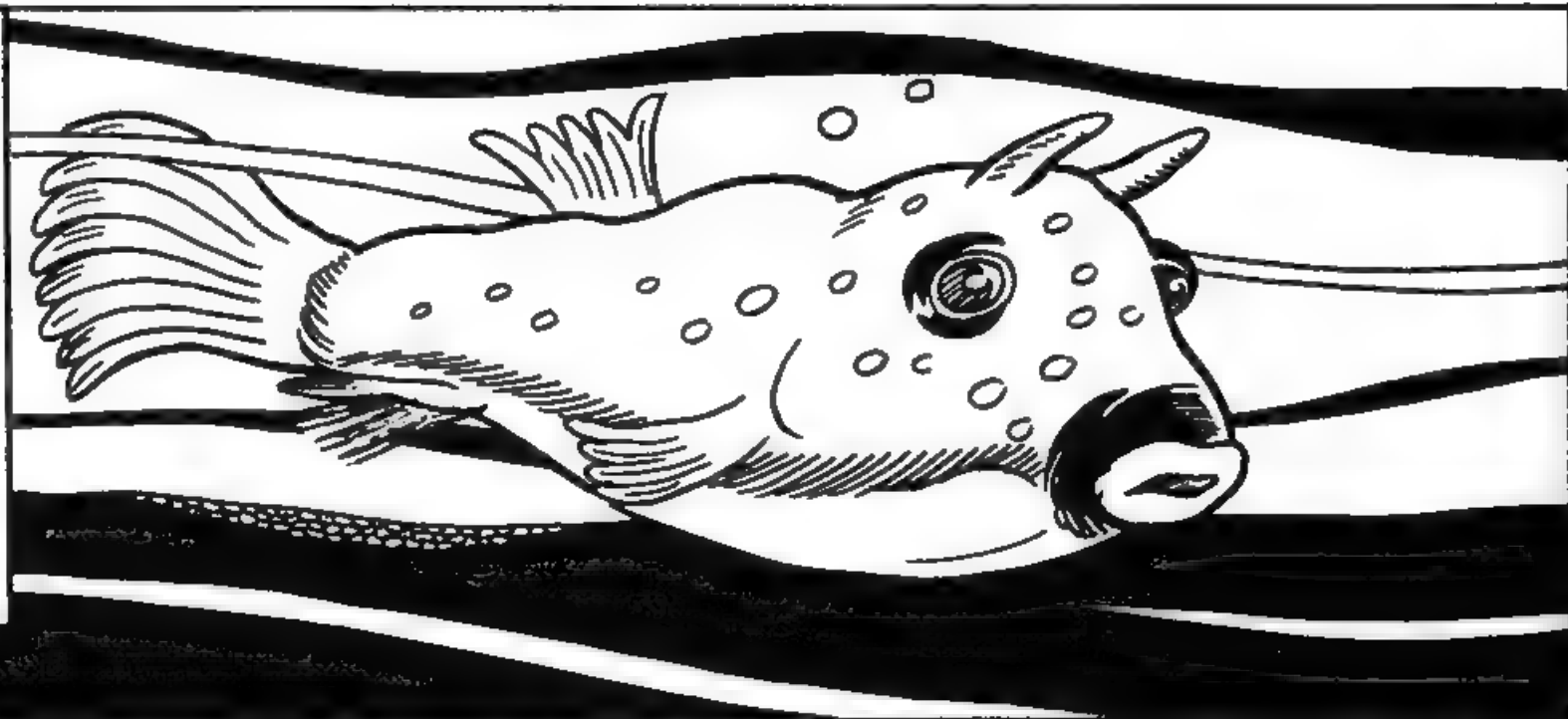
THEN WITHOUT WARNING, SERGEI STEPPED OFF THE LEDGE AND PLUMMETED TO HIS DEATH.

GASP! WHAT A TRAGEDY!

TRULY! LOOK, THOSE SHOES WERE LIKE NEW.

WHEN YOU DON'T LAUGH AT THE PRECEDING, YOU ARE ACCUSED OF NOT BEING FLUENT IN RUSSIAN, BECAUSE IF YOU HAD BEEN FLUENT YOU WOULD HAVE LAUGHED.

I GOT AN AQUARIUM AND REALLY GOT INTO IT. I ALSO SOLD SOME ARTICLES TO **TROPICAL FISH HOBBYIST**, WHICH IS THE MAJOR NATIONAL AQUARIUM PUBLICATION. IT WAS MY FIRST PAYCHECK, \$100 FOR A FOUR PAGE ARTICLE ON THE LONG-HORNED COWFISH.



MY FATHER AT THIS POINT HOOKED UP WITH A WOMAN WHO WAS CLOSER IN AGE TO ME THAN TO HIM. HE EVEN MARRIED HER SO SHE COULD GET CITIZENSHIP (AND EVENTUALLY MOVED IN HER MOTHER AND HER YOUNG DAUGHTER). ALL MY LIFE HE HAD BEEN SAYING IT WAS BETTER TO MARRY A BLACK JEW THAN A WHITE SHIKSA.



AMAZINGLY, HE THOUGHT THAT SOMEHOW I WOULD BE FRIENDS WITH HER! HE INSISTED THAT WE ALL SPEND TIME TOGETHER WHEN I WENT TO VISIT HIM ON THE WEEKEND. I TOLD HIM I DIDN'T WANT TO AND HE BASICALLY TOLD ME:

...TOUGH SHIT.

SO I CALLED BACK AND FILLED HIS ANSWERING MACHINE WITH THE VILEST OBSCENITIES...



SO THE NEXT WEEKEND WE WERE SUPPOSED TO GO TO THE MUSEUM. HE TELLS ME HE HAD TO MAKE A STOP. WE PULL UP TO THIS GROCERY STORE AND HE TELLS ME TO GO IN WITH HIM. I DO. SHE WAS THE CASHIER.



MATTER-OF-FACTLY HE TOLD ME TO APOLOGIZE. IT WASN'T EVEN THAT HE WAS ORDERING ME. IT WAS LIKE HE WANTED ME TO DO SOMETHING, THEREFORE I WOULD DO IT. IT WAS THE EXACT OPPOSITE OF MACHIAVELLI. SO I JUST STOOD THERE, AND SHE JUST STOOD THERE, IN FRONT OF THE WHOLE STORE. I WAS DUMBFOUNDED.



LIVID, HE DROVE ME HOME IN SILENCE.

...I THOUGHT WE'RE GOING TO THE MUSEUM...

...THERE'S BEEN A CHANGE OF PLANS.





LATER SHE
TOLD HIM THAT
I CAME TO THE STORE
WHERE SHE WORKED WITH A
FRIEND OF MINE AND POINTED AT
HER AND LAUGHED. WITHOUT EVEN
ASKING ME HE ASSUMED THIS WAS
TRUE. WE HAVE NEVER HAD A GOOD
RELATIONSHIP SINCE THEN (THEY
HAVE LONG SINCE DIVORCED,
OF COURSE).

I
USED TO
ADMIRE MY FATHER
FOR HIS INTELLIGENCE,
BUT THERE IS NOTHING MORE
PATHETIC TO ME THAN A MID-
LIFE CRISIS, BECAUSE THERE IS
NOTHING MORE IMPORTANT TO ME
THAN INTEGRITY. I WAS-AND
REMAIN-SO EMBARRASSED
THAT HE WOULD MAKE SUCH
AN ASS OF HIMSELF.



I
NEVER DRANK
OR DID ANY DRUGS OR
EVEN DATED IN HIGH SCHOOL.
NO ONE DID, REALLY. IT WAS A
WEIRD SITUATION.

...2,800
GEEKS.
IT WAS
ABSOLUTELY
GREAT.

I AM ONE OF THOSE SMART PEOPLE WHO, WHEN
THEY'RE BORED, LIKE TO SCREW AROUND WITH
OTHERS. ONE TIME ANOTHER FRENCH TEACHER
TOLD US TO WRITE A HORROR STORY. SOMEONE
CAME UP AND READ THEIR LAME PIECE. THEN I READ
MINE, ABOUT A GIRL WHO MURDERED HER FATHER
WHO HAD BEEN RAPING HER. THE TEACHER'S
FACE WAS SO WHITE WITH RAGE AND SHOCK. I
CAN SEE IT RIGHT NOW.



Loup-
Garo

THEN THERE WAS MISS POWELL. MISS POWELL TAUGHT CREATIVE WRITING. SHE WAS A COMPLETE HACK. SHE WANTED US ALL TO WRITE THESE STORIES AS IF WE WERE TEENAGE GIRLS, ALL FLOWERY AND LADEN WITH HEART-WRENCHING EMOTION. I REMEMBER ONE STORY SHE READ US OF HER'S USING HANSEL AND GRETEL AS A METAPHOR FOR A LOOSE WOMAN. THE LAST LINE WAS SOMETHING LIKE....

"I COULDN'T FIND MY WAY BACK. I HAD SCATTERED ALL MY BREADCRUMBS BEHIND ME."



I WROTE STORIES I WANTED TO WRITE, TWISTED THINGS WITH A HUMOROUS EDGE. I DESPISE EMOTIONALISM IN WRITING. EMOTIONS SHOULD BE IMPLIED, FOR ONE, AND EVEN IF EXPLICIT CANNOT BE IN AND OF THEMSELVES THE POINT OF THE STORY. BUT I WAS RESPECTFUL. THEN I FOUND OUT SHE WENT TO MY FRIEND LAURENT AND TOLD HIM THAT IF HE NEVER SAT NEXT TO ME AGAIN (WE CHOSE OUR OWN SEATS) HE WOULD GET A GUARANTEED 90 IN THE CLASS...

BUT IF YOU DO, YOUR GRADE WILL SUFFER.



THIS MEANT WAR. MY STORIES GREW INCREASINGLY ABSURD AND RIDICULOUS. THEY WERE PERFECTLY GOOD, BUT THEY WERE NOT AT ALL WHAT SHE WAS GOING FOR IN THAT CLASS. IF SHE HAD JUST LEFT WELL ENOUGH ALONE, THINGS WOULD HAVE BEEN FINE. BY THE END OF THE SEMESTER EVERY SINGLE PERSON, EVEN THE LAME CHICKS WHO HAD BEEN KISSING HER ASS, HAD TURNED AGAINST HER.



PEOPLE STARTED FOLLOWING MY CUES AND WRITING CRAZINESS. ONE EXERCISE WE HAD WAS TO PICK SOMEONE'S BOOKBAG AND DESCRIBE WHAT WAS IN IT.

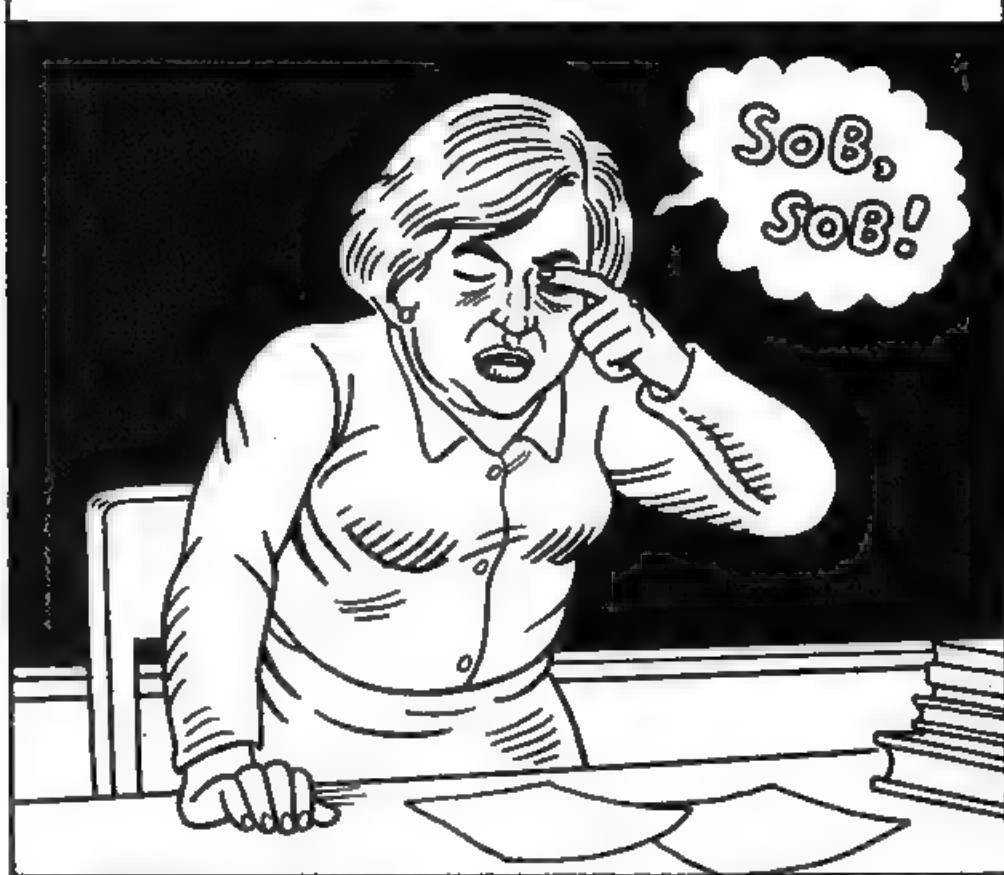
MISS POWELL CALLED ON MY FRIEND ANDREA WHO READ A PIECE ABOUT HOW POWELL'S BAG WAS FILLED WITH WHIPS AND HANDCUFFS DUE TO HER CHOSEN LIFE AS A DOMINATRIX.

"WHAT OTHER SECRETS DID MISS POWELL'S BAG HOLD?"

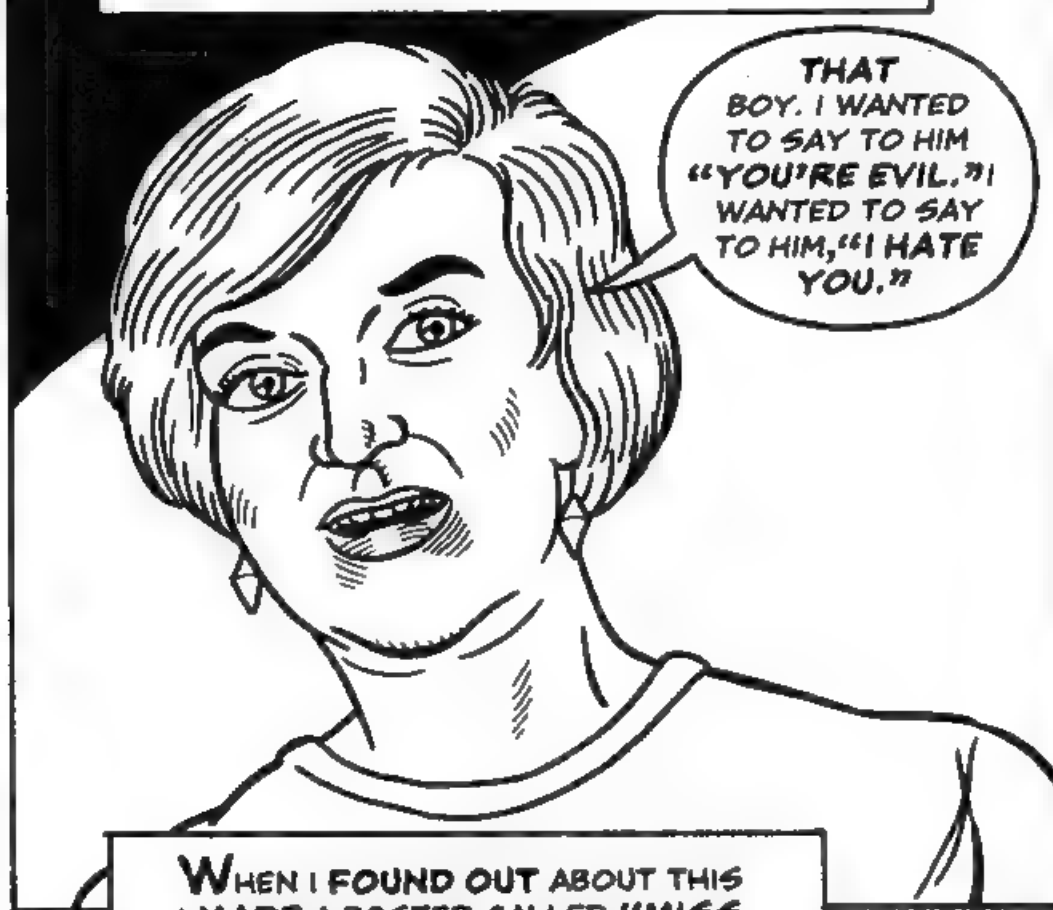
"THE GLINT IN MICHAEL'S EYE REVEALED THE ANSWER."



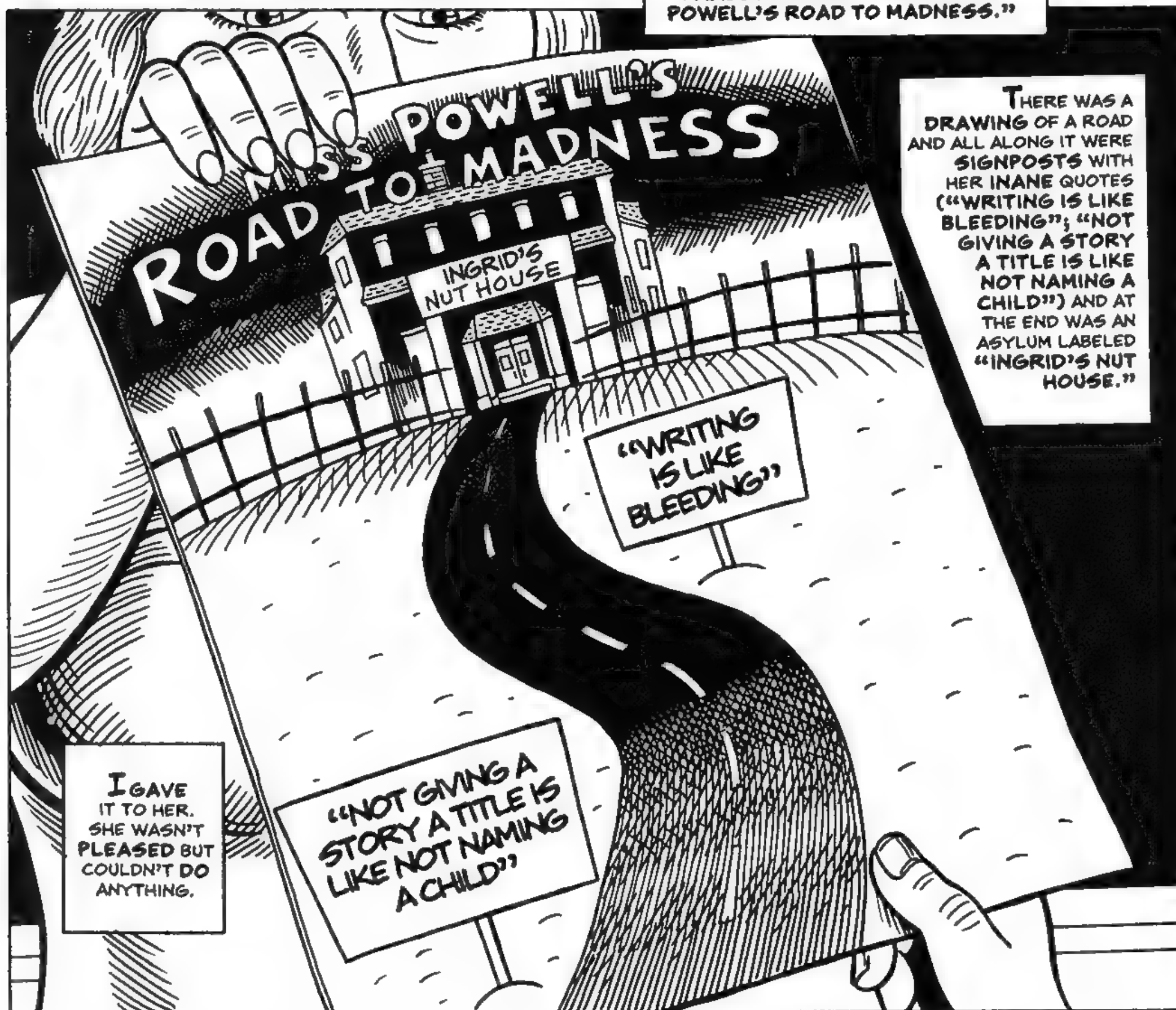
THE LAST DAY OF CLASS POWELL WAS CRYING AND IT WAS ONE OF THE BEST FEELINGS I EVER HAD. I HAD TAKEN DOWN MY OSTENSIVE SUPERIOR.



THE NEXT SEMESTER MY NAME SOMEHOW CAME UP IN CLASS AND SHE ANNOUNCED:



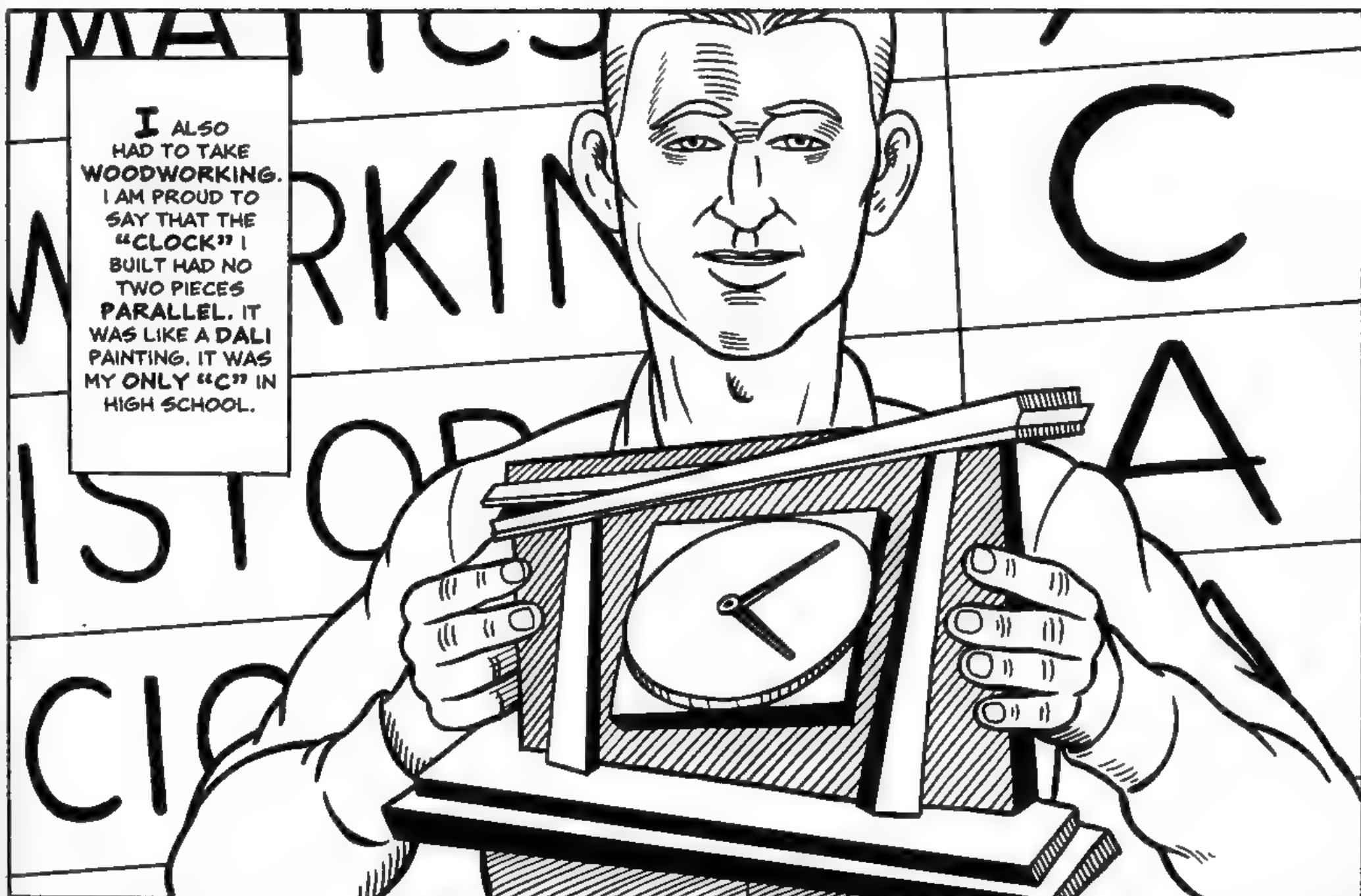
WHEN I FOUND OUT ABOUT THIS I MADE A POSTER CALLED "MISS POWELL'S ROAD TO MADNESS."



THERE WAS A DRAWING OF A ROAD AND ALL ALONG IT WERE SIGNPOSTS WITH HER INANE QUOTES ("WRITING IS LIKE BLEEDING"; "NOT GIVING A STORY A TITLE IS LIKE NOT NAMING A CHILD") AND AT THE END WAS AN ASYLUM LABELED "INGRID'S NUT HOUSE."

I GAVE IT TO HER. SHE WASN'T PLEASED BUT COULDN'T DO ANYTHING.

I ALSO HAD TO TAKE WOODWORKING. I AM PROUD TO SAY THAT THE "CLOCK" I BUILT HAD NO TWO PIECES PARALLEL. IT WAS LIKE A DALI PAINTING. IT WAS MY ONLY "C" IN HIGH SCHOOL.



ONE YEAR I DRESSED UP AS A BATTERED HILLARY CLINTON FOR HALLOWEEN. THE PICTURE MADE THE YEARBOOK. SINCE I WAS CLOSE TO 100 LBS. EVERYONE MISTOOK ME FOR A REAL WOMAN.



PRETTY MUCH EVERYBODY AT STUYVESANT WAS ASIAN OR JEWISH. THIS KID NAMED EUGENE KRYMKO RAN A JEWISH ORGANIZATION. HE PUT UP THESE POSTERS ARGUING THAT INTERMARRIAGE WAS GOING TO MEAN THE END OF THE JEWS ("A SPIRITUAL HOLOCAUST") WITHIN SO MANY YEARS.



I WAS NOT, OF COURSE, A MEMBER OF THIS GROUP AND I DIDN'T CARE IN THE SLIGHTEST ABOUT INTERMARRIAGE.

ANYWAY, THE PRINCIPAL WAS A MAN NAMED ABRAHAM BAUMEL. IT WAS HIS LAST YEAR BEFORE RETIRING AND APPARENTLY HIS DAUGHTER HAD MARRIED A NON-JEW.



HE WAS UPSET ABOUT THE POSTER AND ALSO SOME OTHER ZIONIST POSTER THAT EUGENE WAS PUTTING UP. EUGENE CAME TO ME BECAUSE HE WAS SCARED TO TALK TO BAUMEL AND HE KNEW EXACTLY WHAT MY BIG, FAT MOUTH WAS GOOD FOR.

SO EUGENE NAMED ME THE VICE PRESIDENT AND WE WENT IN TO TALK TO BAUMEL. I DON'T RECALL EUGENE SAYING ONE WORD IN THE MEETING. THE FIRST THING THAT BAUMEL WANTED WAS TO HAVE AN ARAB PARENT SPEAK TO THE GROUP ABOUT THE PALESTINIAN POINT OF VIEW.

ABSOLUTELY NOT.

ANY STUDENT IS PERFECTLY WELCOME TO COME AND WELCOME TO EXPRESS THEMSELVES, EVEN IF THEY ENDORSE THE HOLOCAUST, BUT IT IS UNFAIR TO EXPECT STUDENTS TO HAVE TO ARGUE WITH A PARENT.



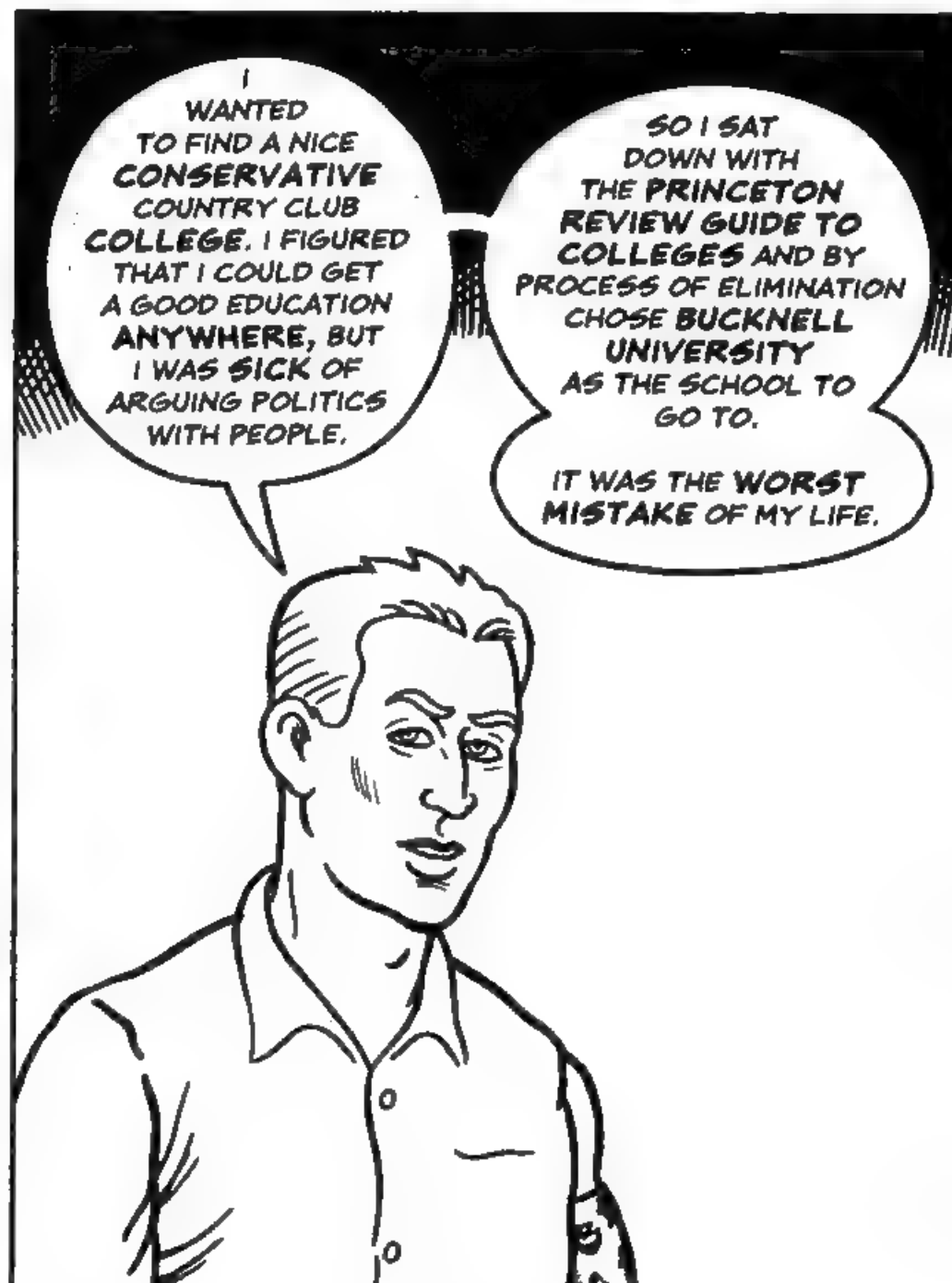
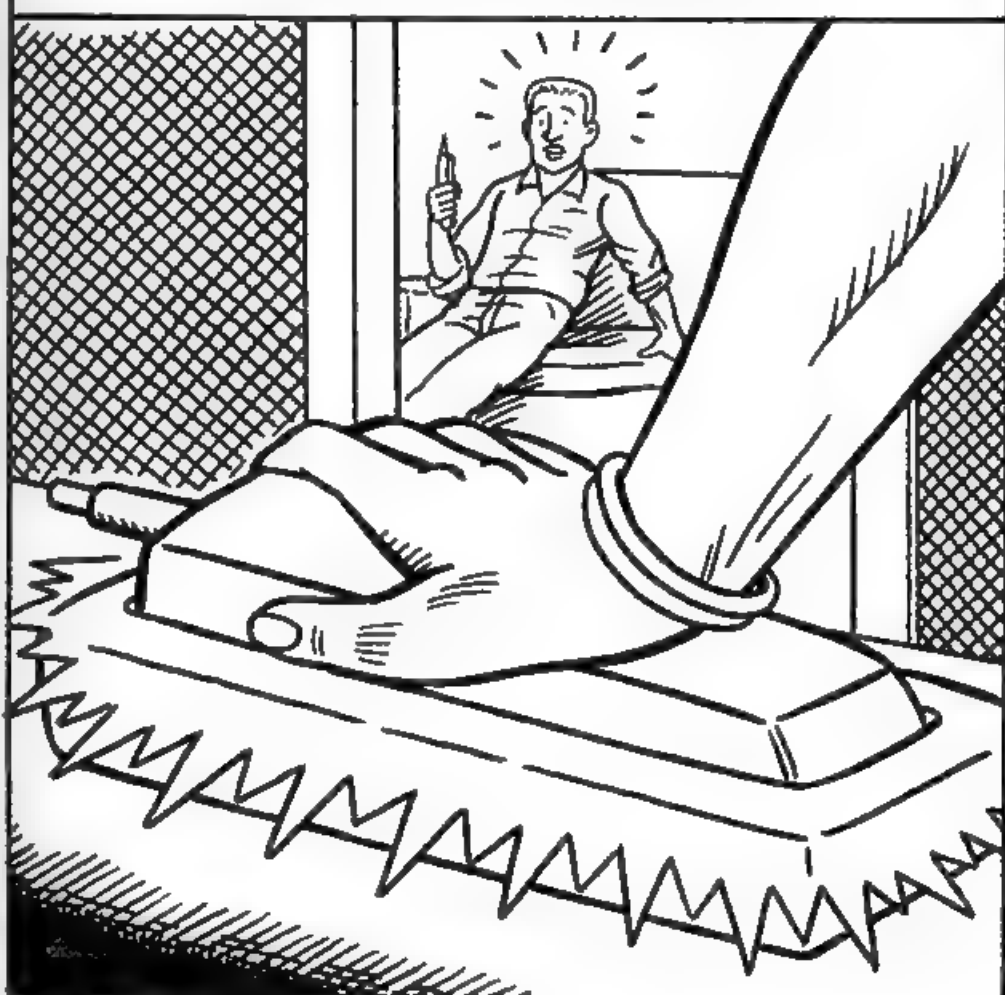
HE ASKED US TO COMPROMISE AND I TOLD HIM THAT THERE WAS NOTHING TO COMPROMISE ABOUT WHATSOEVER, THAT THE RULES WERE CLEAR (WHICH THEY WERE) AND THERE WAS NO REASON FOR US TO CARE BECAUSE A PARENT WAS UPSET.

I CAN ARRANGE FOR YOU TO BE SUSPENDED IF YOU CONTINUE TO PUT UP POSTERS ATTACKING INTERMARRIAGE.



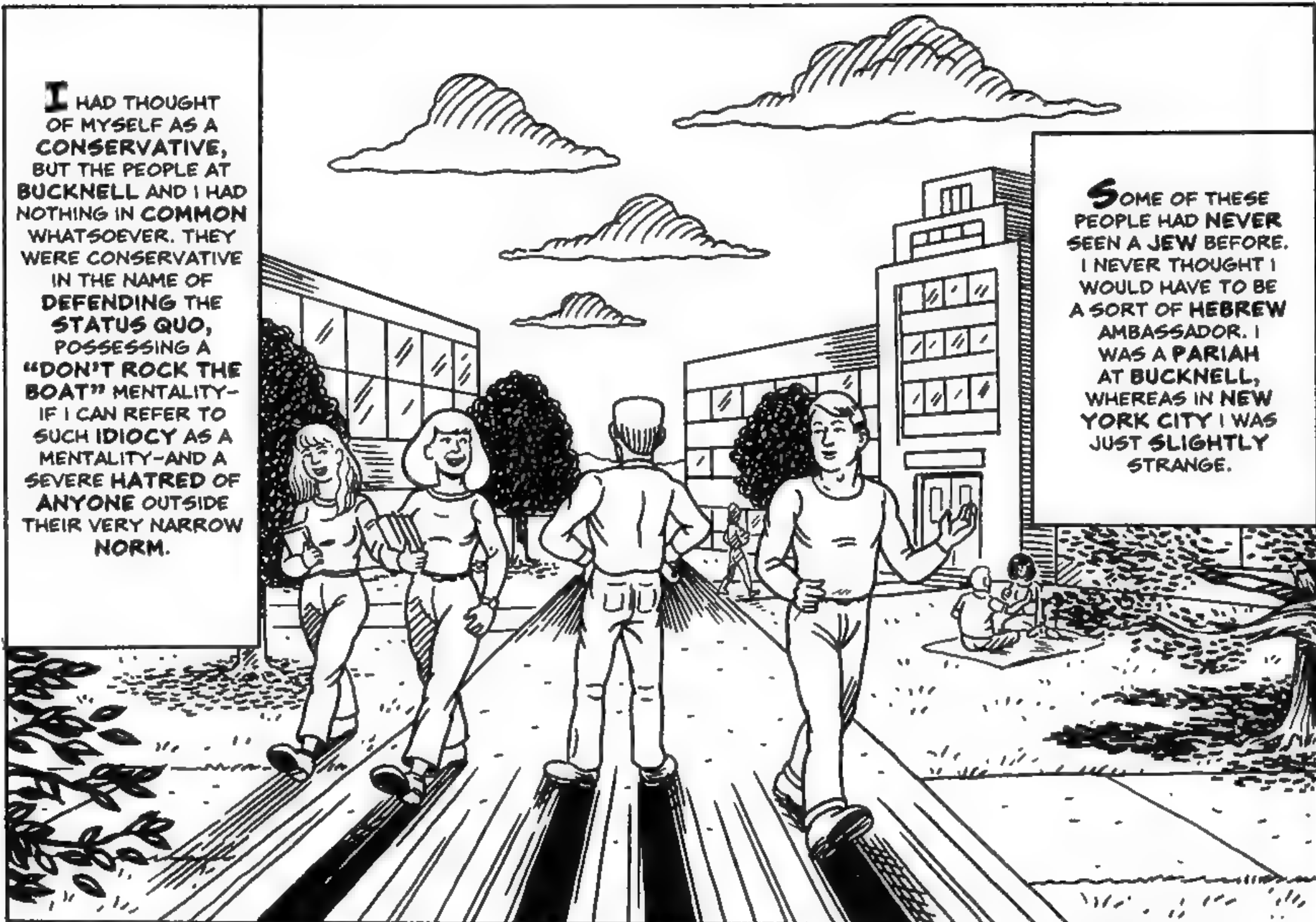


I CALLED THE ACLU AND BAUMEL SHUT HIS BULLYING MOUTH. IN FACT I WAS GOING ON A RELIGIOUS TALK SHOW TO SPEAK ABOUT IT AS WELL. BUT WHEN THEY CALLED ME THAT SUNDAY MORNING, MY MOTHER PICKED UP THE EXTENSION AND DENIED ME PERMISSION TO GO ON THE RADIO. SHE DOESN'T KNOW WHY SHE DID THAT, SHE CLAIMS NOW. I DON'T REALLY CARE WHY. I HAVE, OF COURSE, NEVER FORGIVEN HER FOR THIS IF ONLY BECAUSE IT WOULD HAVE ENTAILED NO SACRIFICE BY HER TO HAVE ME ON THE AIR.



I HAD THOUGHT OF MYSELF AS A CONSERVATIVE, BUT THE PEOPLE AT BUCKNELL AND I HAD NOTHING IN COMMON WHATSOEVER. THEY WERE CONSERVATIVE IN THE NAME OF DEFENDING THE STATUS QUO, POSSESSING A "DON'T ROCK THE BOAT" MENTALITY—IF I CAN REFER TO SUCH IDIOCY AS A MENTALITY—AND A SEVERE HATRED OF ANYONE OUTSIDE THEIR VERY NARROW NORM.

SOME OF THESE PEOPLE HAD NEVER SEEN A JEW BEFORE. I NEVER THOUGHT I WOULD HAVE TO BE A SORT OF HEBREW AMBASSADOR. I WAS A PARIAH AT BUCKNELL, WHEREAS IN NEW YORK CITY I WAS JUST SLIGHTLY STRANGE.



THESE WASPS HATED EVEN BRINGING UP CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES, AND RESENTED ME NOT FOR MY STANDS BUT FOR THE FACT THAT I ADDRESSED CERTAIN TOPICS TO BEGIN WITH. AND IT WAS ALL UNDERNEATH A FALSE VENEER OF KINDLINESS AND FRIENDLINESS.

GASP!
CHOKES

BUT WHAT CAN YOU DO WHEN YOU ARE TRAPPED IN A DESERT OF ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM? HOW CAN YOU FIGHT YOUR ENVIRONMENT? IT WAS SUFFOCATING. IT WAS ALMOST AS IF I LITERALLY COULDN'T BREATHE, AS IF THE VERY AIR WAS DRAWING THE LIFE OUT OF ME. AND BECAUSE I GOT A HUGE SCHOLARSHIP, TRANSFERRING WASN'T AN OPTION.



I HAD THREE VERY CLOSE FRIENDS, A SET OF ROOM-MATES NAMED LAURIE, ANNE AND SUSAN. I PROBABLY WOULD'VE KILLED MYSELF IF IT WASN'T FOR THEM. AND I DON'T SUFFER FROM DEPRESSION.



I WAS JUST GENUINELY BEING DRIVEN TO MADNESS BY THAT BEAUTIFUL SCHOOL WITH THE BEAUTIFUL CAMPUS AND THE BEAUTIFUL STUDENTS WITH THEIR UGLY, UGLY SOULS.

I STARTED WRITING FOR THE SCHOOL NEWSPAPER, JUST THE NASTIEST EDITORIALS I COULD BEAR TO WRITE IN HOPES OF PROVOKING SOME SORT OF INTELLIGENT DISCUSSION.

THERE WAS NONE.

I LASHED OUT AT THE SCHOOL FOR HAVING A HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY WHEN IT WAS THE GRANDPARENTS OF THE STUDENTS WHO COULDN'T BE BOTHERED TO LET DIRTY JEWS INTO THE COUNTRY BACK IN THE DAY. WHAT CROCODILE TEARS.



SEXISM

I READ A LOT OF BOOKS FROM BUCKNELL'S EXCELLENT LIBRARY, GIVING MYSELF A SORT OF EXTRA-CURRICULAR LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION. I WAS A BUSINESS MAJOR, BUT MOST OF THE DEPARTMENTS EVEN AT BUCKNELL WERE FULL OF MARXISTS AND DECONSTRUCTIONIST WACKOS. I MEAN MARXISTS LITERALLY.



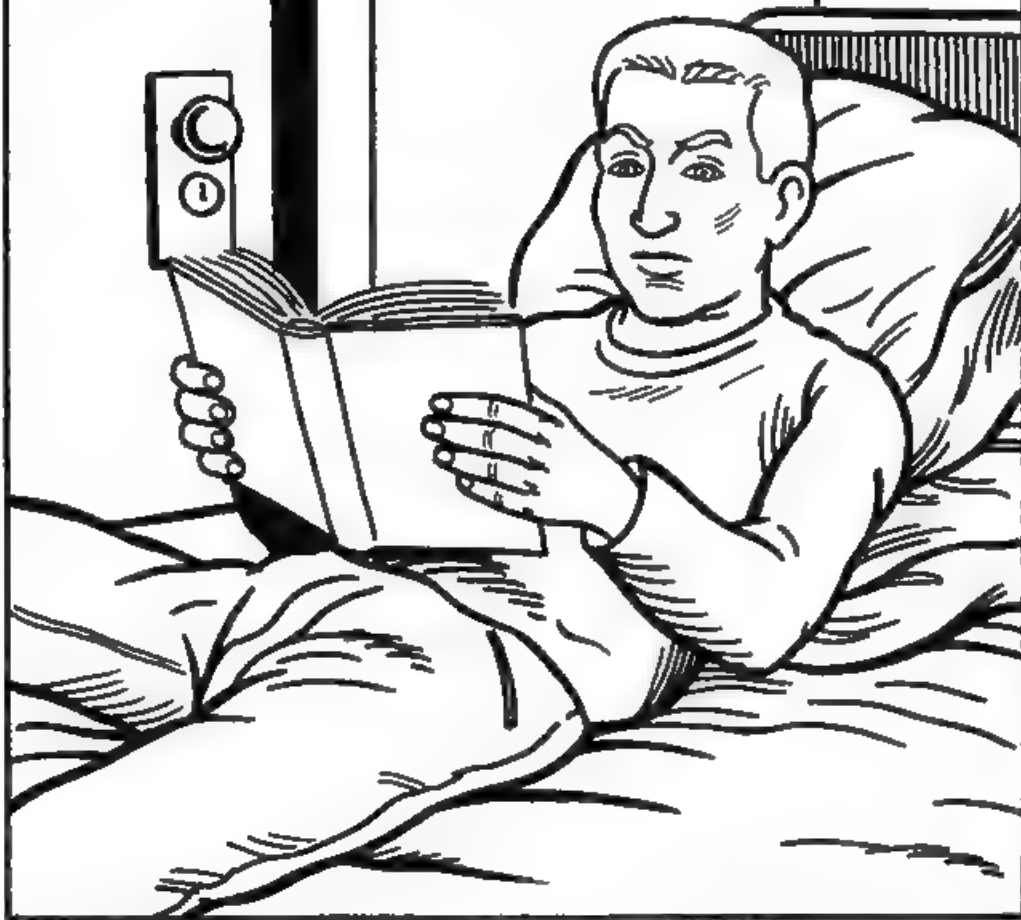
FOR EXAMPLE, THE HEAD OF THE ECONOMICS DEPARTMENT WAS A MARXIST-FEMINIST WHO ARGUED SINCE THE LAWS OF ECONOMICS WERE DISCOVERED BY MEN THEY WERE INHERENTLY SEXIST AND HAD TO BE REDISCOVERED BY WOMEN.

I SIGNED UP FOR A CLASS ON INDIVIDUALISM; ON THE SYLLABUS FOR THE COURSE WAS "BIRTH OF A NATION," THE WHITE SUPREMACIST MOVIE. THE LINE I ALWAYS USED -- AND MEANT -- WHEN PEOPLE ASKED ME WHY I WASN'T TAKING PHILOSOPHY AND POLI-SCI COURSES WAS:

I DON'T WANT TO WASTE MY TIME EDUCATING PROFESSORS.



ONE OF THE BOOKS I CAME ACROSS WAS AYN RAND'S "THE FOUNTAINHEAD." THE REST IS HISTORY, SO TO SPEAK.



BUCKNELL IS A VERY HOMOPHOBIC CAMPUS, AS WELL. FLAG & B (THE FOUNDATION OF LESBIANS, GAYS AND BISEXUALS) CAME UP WITH THE IDEA OF HAVING JEANS DAY: WEAR JEANS TO SHOW YOUR SUPPORT FOR GAY RIGHTS. NOW, THIS WAS A COMPLETE CROCK. THEY BARELY ADVERTISED IT, AND CONSEQUENTLY, WHEN A LOT OF PEOPLE WORE JEANS THEY COULD CLAIM THAT BUCKNELL SUPPORTS GAY RIGHTS. BUT THIS WAS A TOTAL FRAUD, I THOUGHT.



I ALSO THOUGHT IT DISGUSTING THAT ANY GAY STUDENTS WOULD BE SEEKING VALIDATION FROM THE LIKES OF BUCKNELL'S SPOILED SUBURBAN BRAT POPULATION.



SO ONE YEAR WE IN THE COLLEGE REPUBLICANS HAD KHAKE DAY ON THE SAME DAY. ALL OUR SIGNS SAID WERE, "WEAR KHAKIS TO SHOW YOUR SUPPORT OF FAMILY VALUES." OF COURSE EVERYONE'S TRUE COLORS CAME OUT, AND THOSE COLORS RANGED FROM TAN TO BEIGE TO GREEN, BUT VERY LITTLE JEANS BLUE. IT WAS THE ANTI-GAY WHO WERE OUTED THAT DAY. SINCE THE KHAKE DAY IDEA WAS MINE AND SHOWED HOW LITTLE SUPPORT GAYS REALLY HAD, I WAS COMPARED TO HITLER.

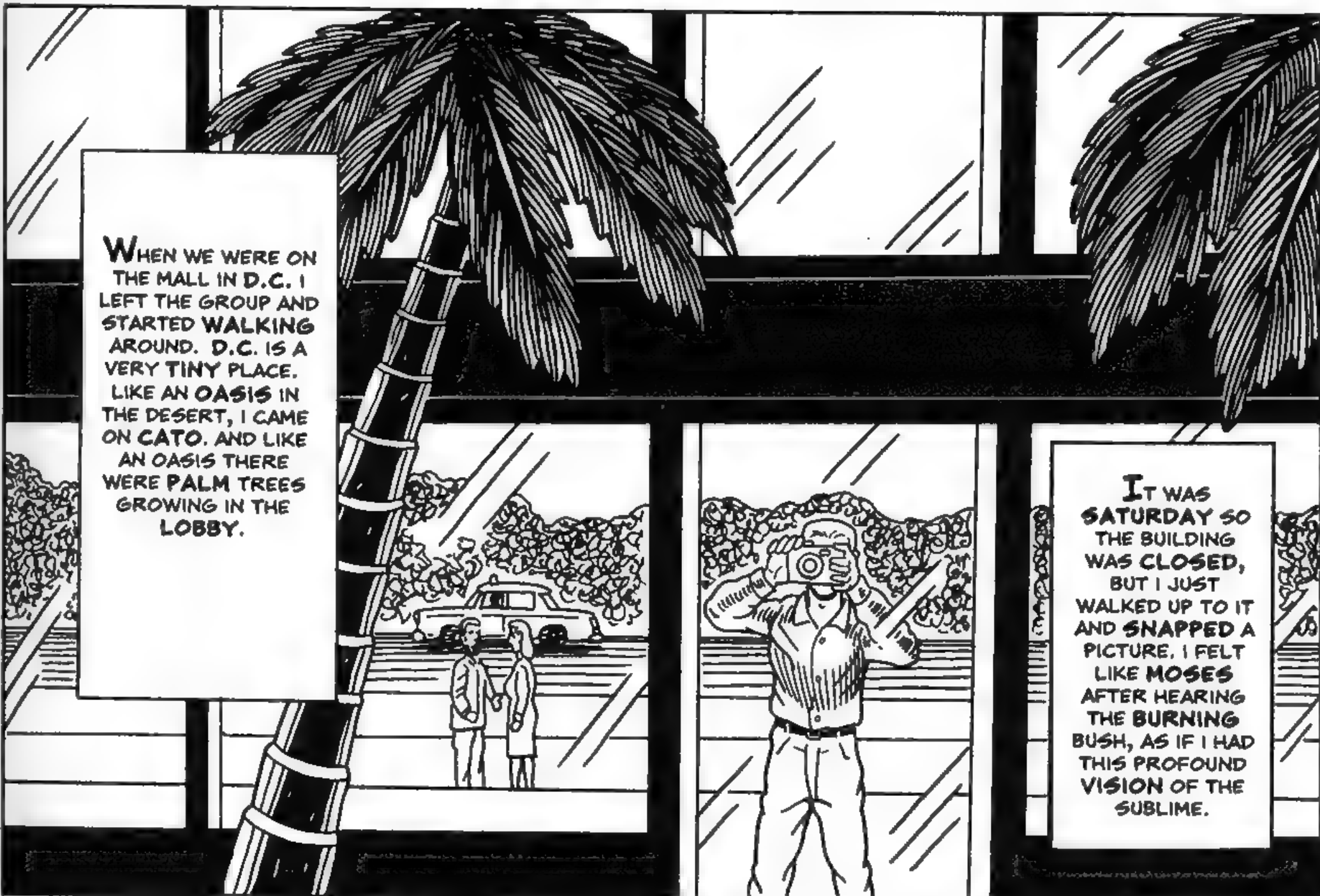


ONE TIME WE COLLEGE REPUBLICANS WENT TO D.C. I WOULD OFTEN HAVE HUGE ARGUMENTS WITH THE PEOPLE IN THE CLUB BECAUSE THEY WERE SOCIALLY CONSERVATIVE AND BELIEVED IN THINGS LIKE LESS IMMIGRATION AND PRO-LIFE.

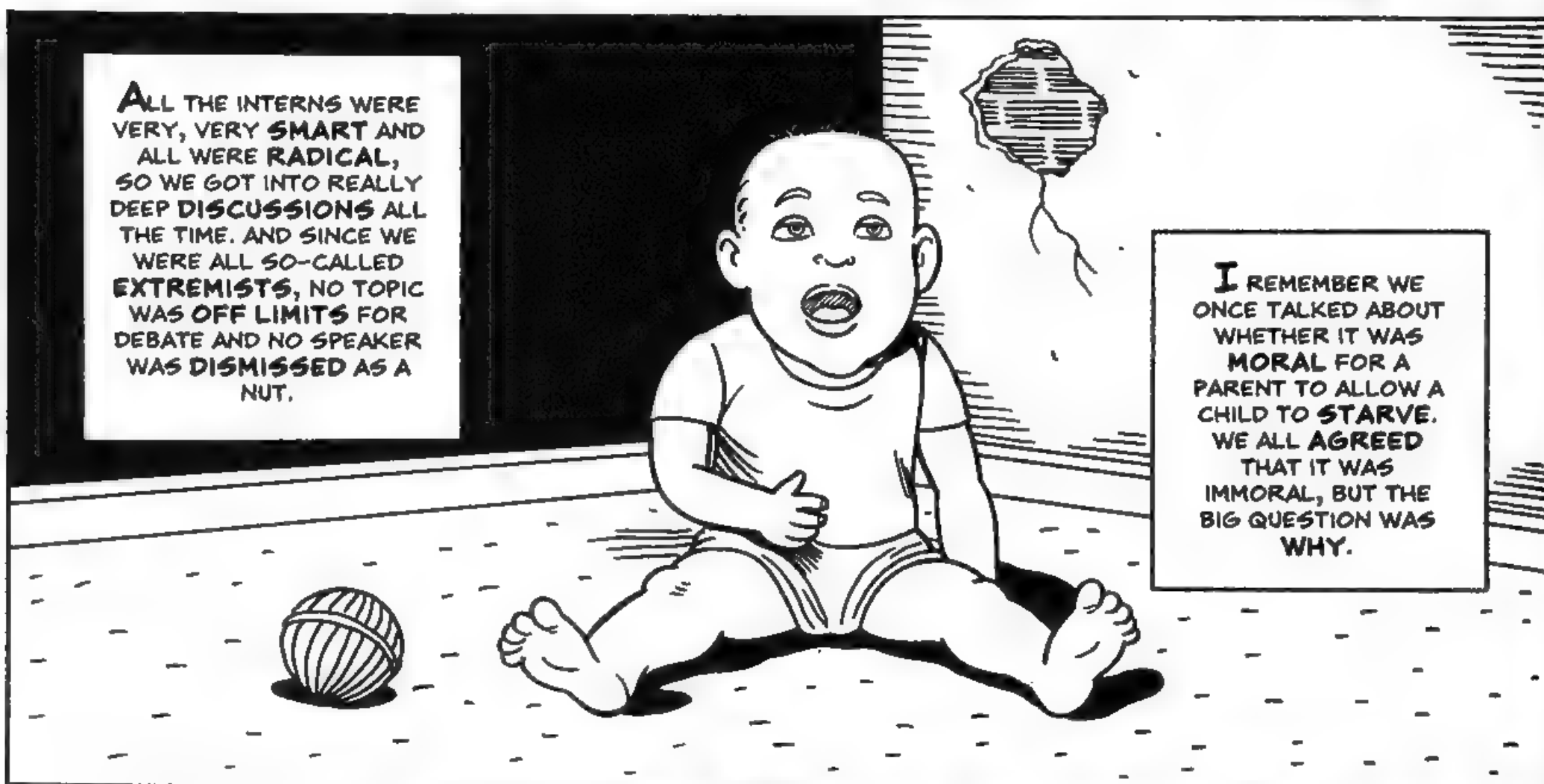


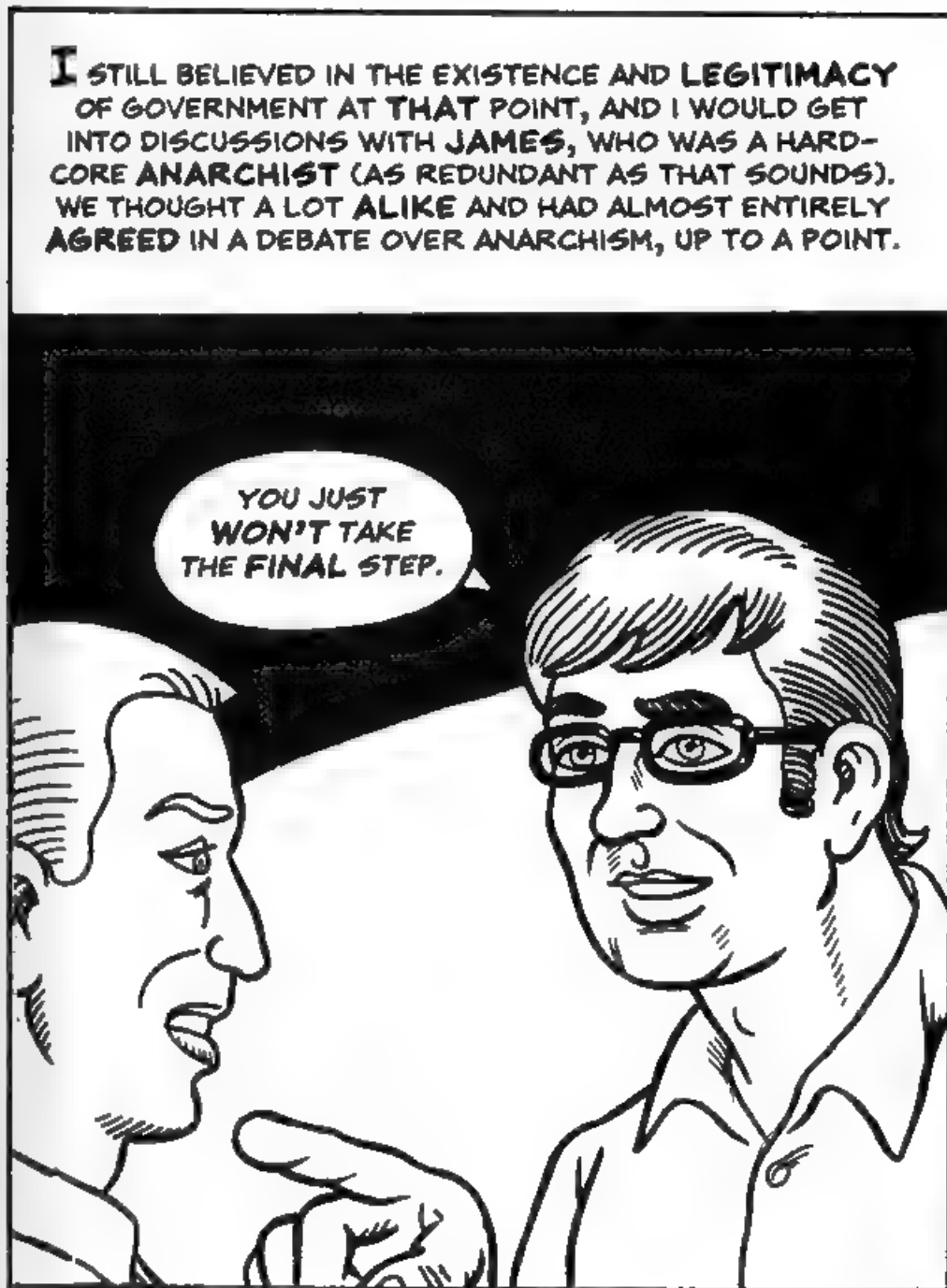
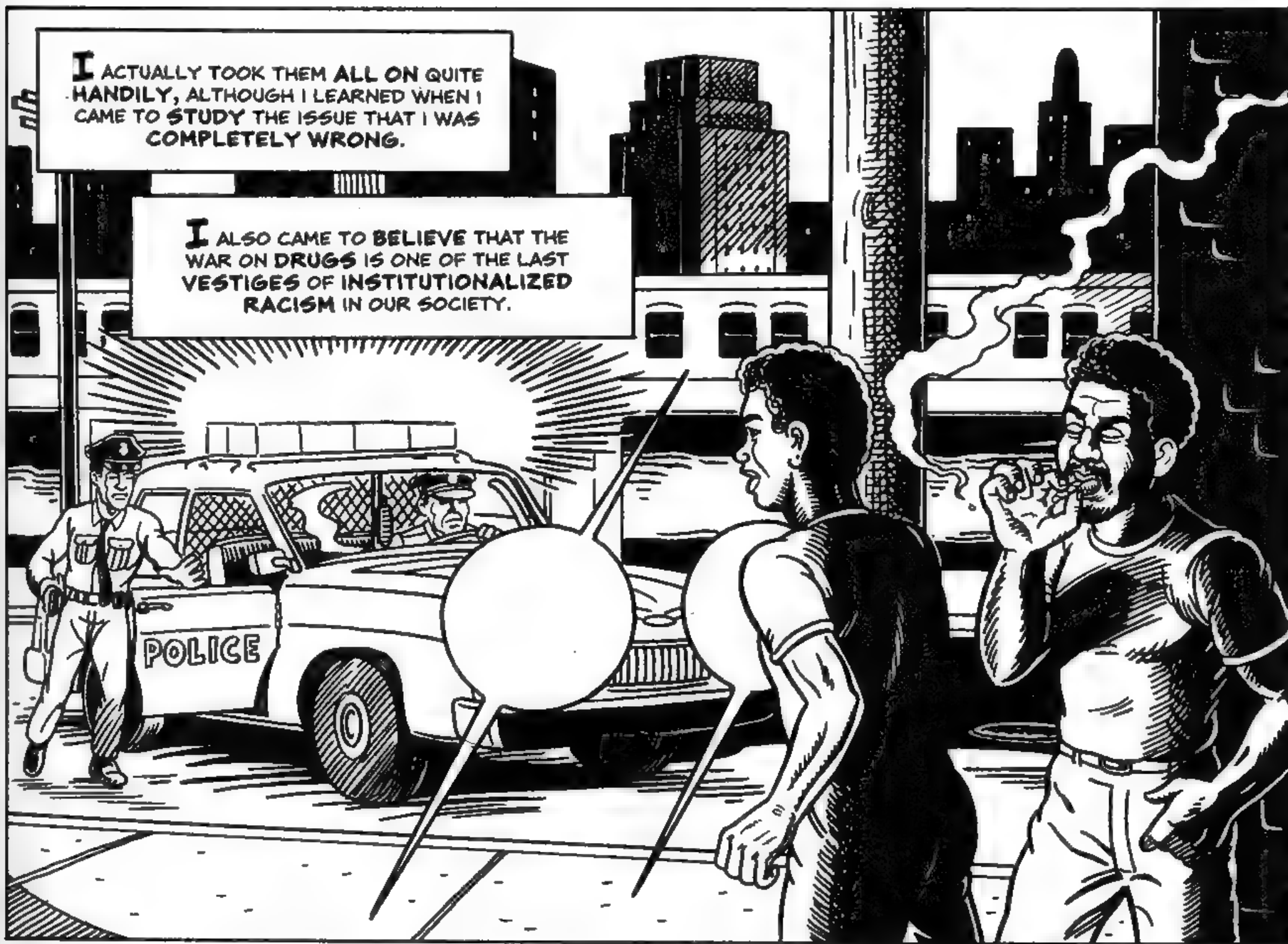
ANYWAY, THERE WAS AN ARTICLE ABOUT THIS TIME, I THINK IN NEW YORK MAGAZINE, ABOUT A LIBERTARIAN THINK TANK CALLED THE CATO INSTITUTE. THEY CALLED IT "THE HOUSE THAT HOWARD ROARK BUILT," ROARK BEING THE HERO OF "THE FOUNTAINHEAD."

WHEN WE WERE ON THE MALL IN D.C. I LEFT THE GROUP AND STARTED WALKING AROUND. D.C. IS A VERY TINY PLACE. LIKE AN OASIS IN THE DESERT, I CAME ON CATO. AND LIKE AN OASIS THERE WERE PALM TREES GROWING IN THE LOBBY.



IT WAS SATURDAY SO THE BUILDING WAS CLOSED, BUT I JUST WALKED UP TO IT AND SNAPPED A PICTURE. I FELT LIKE MOSES AFTER HEARING THE BURNING BUSH, AS IF I HAD THIS PROFOUND VISION OF THE SUBLIME.





AT THE SAME TIME I HAD TO PUT UP WITH REGULAR CLASS THREE DAYS A WEEK. OUR TEACHER WAS AN UTTER MONGOLOID BY THE NAME OF MARK ROZELL WHO DESCRIBED HIMSELF AS A MODERATE REPUBLICAN.



TO ME, A MODERATE REPUBLICAN IS THE LOWEST FORM OF INTELLECTUAL LIFE ON EARTH. FOR SOMEONE TO BE MODERATE IN PRINCIPLE IS BY DEFINITION TO HAVE NO PRINCIPLES WHATSOEVER, TO BE A CRAVEN PUSSY AFRAID TO TAKE A STAND ON ANY ISSUE.

AS MY HERO THE ABOLITIONIST WILLIAM LLOYD GARRISON SAID:

INCREMENTALISM
IN THEORY MEANS
PERPETUITY
IN PRACTICE.



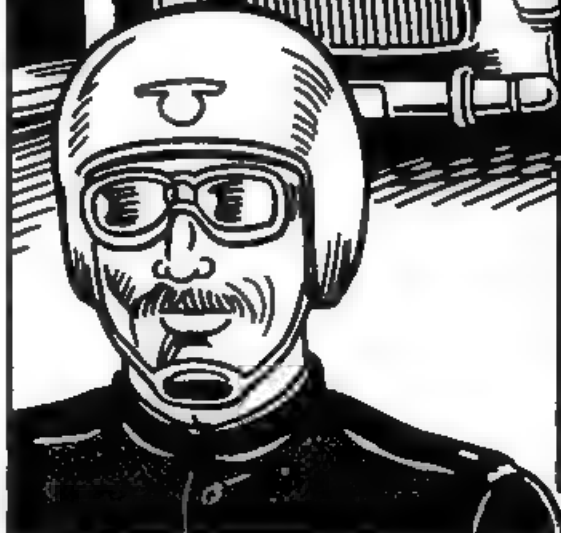
YOU MODERATE YOUR VIEWS IN THE ROUGH AND TUMBLE OF POLITICAL LIFE, BUT YOU DON'T DO THAT IN THE SAFE CONFINES OF YOUR OWN MIND WHEN YOU HAVE NO OPPONENTS YOU MUST DEAL WITH. WHAT SLIME.

ANWAY HE DID NOT COTTON TO ME ONE BIT:

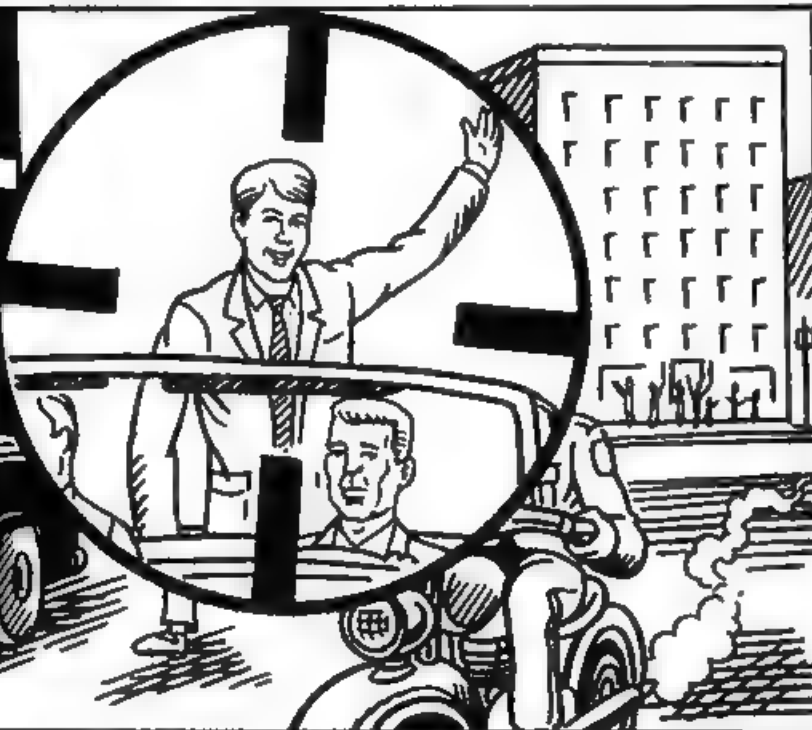
IF YOU COULD JUST GET AYN RAND OUT OF YOUR HEAD FOR ONE MINUTE, MAYBE YOU'D SEE THAT ISSUES AREN'T SO BLACK AND WHITE.



IN RESPONSE TO THAT, FOR MY NEXT PAPER I WROTE ABOUT THE MORALITY OF POLITICAL ASSASSINATION.



I ARGUED THAT EMPLOYEES OF CERTAIN GOVERNMENT AGENCIES, "LIKE THE ATF, FTC AND FCC" HAVE WAIVED THEIR RIGHTS TO LIFE, KNOWING FULL WELL THAT HIS WIFE WORKED FOR THE FTC. THERE WAS NOTHING HE COULD DO, SINCE I COINED EVERYTHING IN PHILOSOPHICAL LANGUAGE, BUT I COULD ONLY IMAGINE HOW HE FELT.



THERE WAS OSTENSIBLY ANOTHER PART TO AMERICA'S PROGRAM, A WEEKLY CLASS WHERE WE WERE MENTORED. I TOTALLY BLEW IT OFF, SINCE MY GRADES WOULD NOT CARRY OVER TO BUCKNELL, AND MOST OF THE OTHER STUDENTS BLEW IT OFF AS WELL. AS A FINAL WE HAD TO WRITE A PAPER ABOUT WHAT ISSUES WE FELT WOULD BE IMPORTANT IN TEN YEARS. I DECIDED TO WRITE THE MOST ABSURD THING I COULD. SO I WROTE:

The three things Americans will be concerned about in ten years are gay rights, free trade and the growing abduction of U.S. citizens by U.F.O.'s.

I SAID, "FOR YEARS THE U.S. POPULATION HAS BEEN ABDUCTED BY ALIENS WITH THE EXPRESS CONSENT OF U.S. GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS. EVENTUALLY THE CITIZENRY WILL WAKE UP TO THIS PROBLEM AND VOTE OUT THE POLITICIANS WHO ALLOWED THIS TO HAPPEN.

THEN THEY WILL MOVE TO EUROPE TO VOTE OUT THOSE COMPLICIT ELECTED FIGURES, THEREBY LEAVING THE U.S. TO ITS ORIGINAL OWNERS, THE NATIVE AMERICANS..."



ONE OF THE SPEAKERS WHO CAME TO SPEAK WAS ANN STONE, THE CHAIRMAN OF REPUBLICANS FOR CHOICE. I GOT AN INTERNSHIP WITH HER AND, AFTER MY SEMESTER AT AMERICAN ENDED, STAYED IN D.C. FOR THE SUMMER AND WORKED AT RFC.



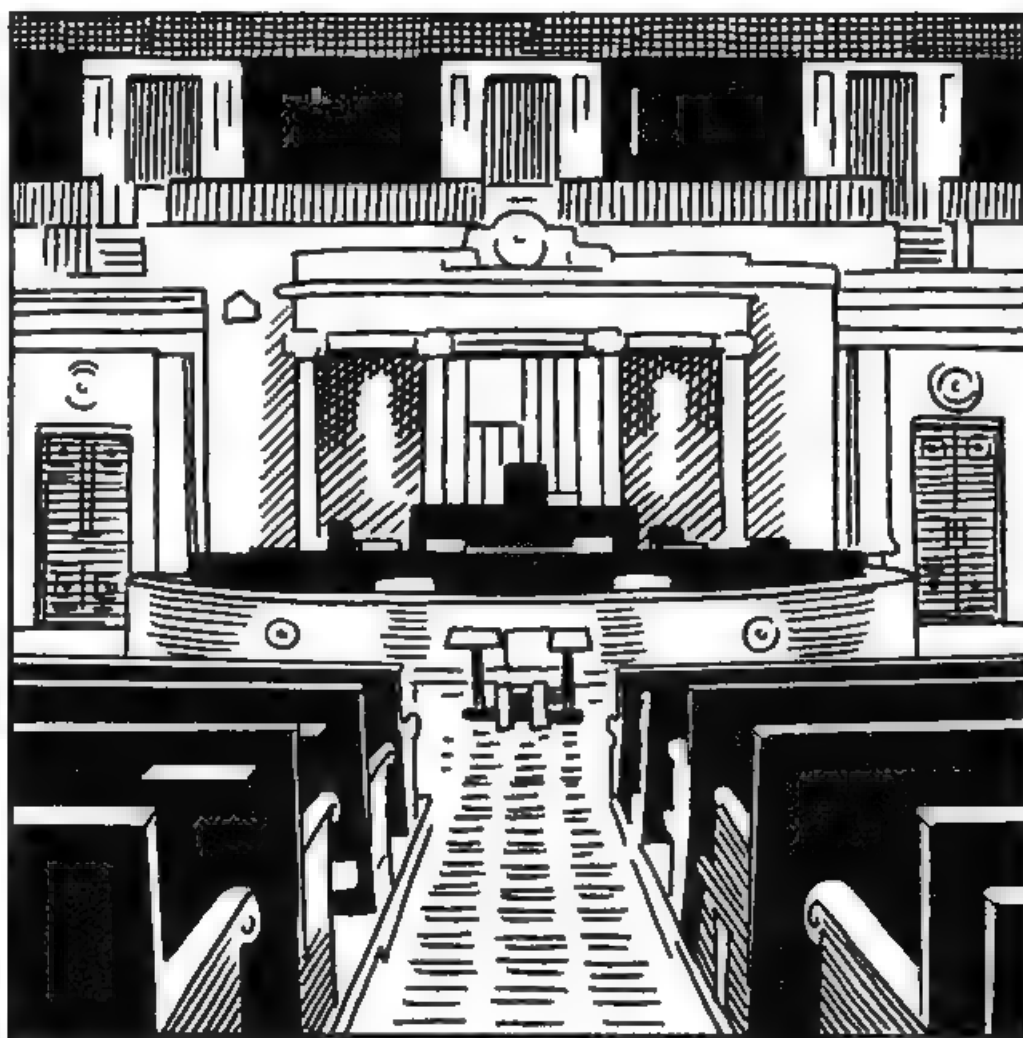
IT WAS GREAT BECAUSE ANN WAS VERY WELL-KNOWN POLITICALLY. SHE WAS CLOSE FRIENDS WITH THE NIXONS AND MAUREEN REAGAN, BUT SHE WAS KNOWN AS A GADFLY. SHE NEVER FAILED TO CASTIGATE THE GOP FOR ALLOWING A PRO-LIFE MINORITY TO DICTATE POLICY.

SHE PULLED ONE STUNT BEFORE I WAS THERE THAT WAS BRILLIANT. THE REPUBLICAN PLATFORM HAD A PLANK CALLING FOR A CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT DEFINING A FETUS AS A PERSON.

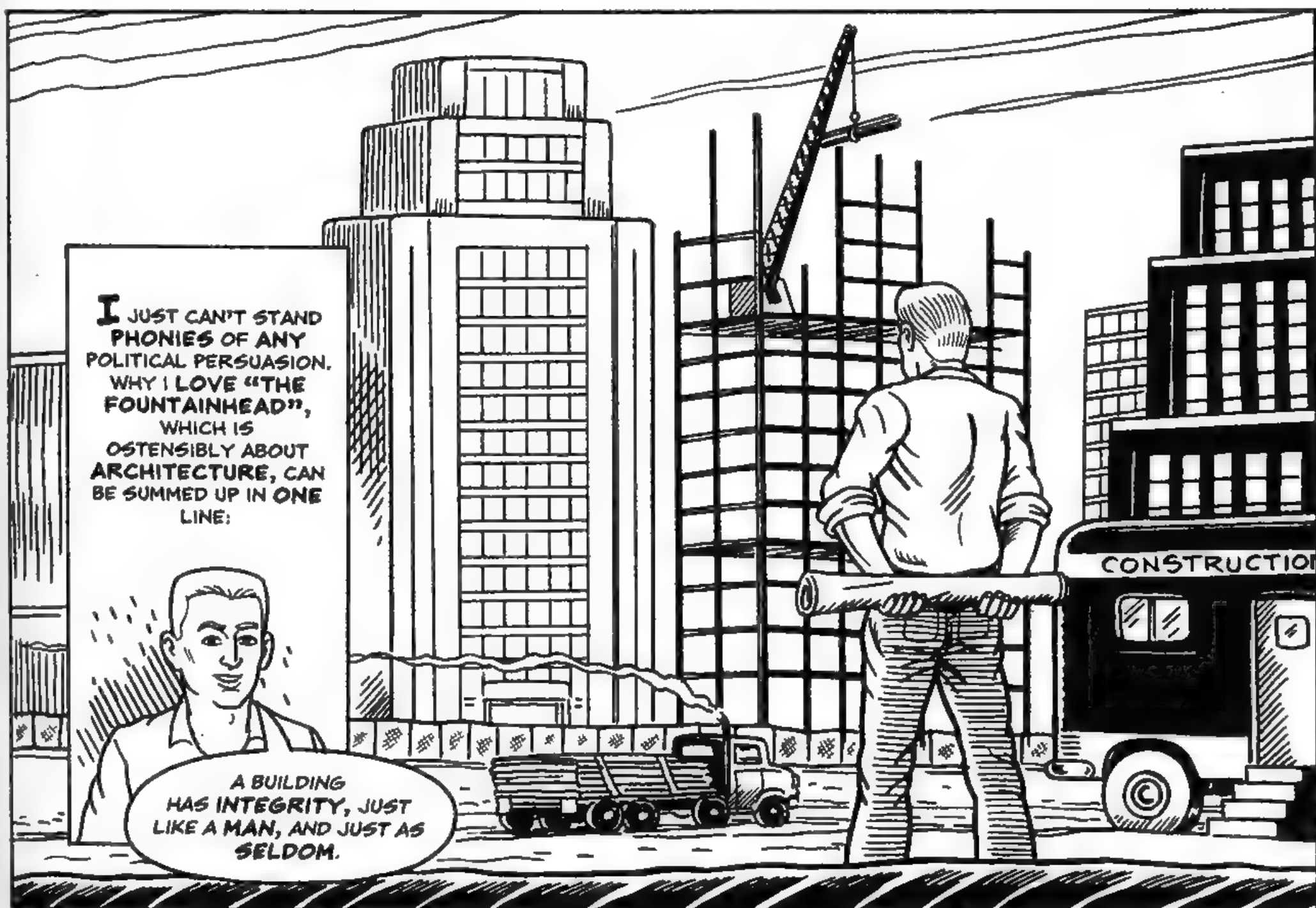


IF THIS PSYCHOTIC AMENDMENT EVER PASSED, NO JUDGE WOULD HAVE ANY CHOICE BUT TO FIND ANY WOMAN WHO HAD AN ABORTION GUILTY OF FIRST-DEGREE MURDER. THAT COULD BE THE ONLY LEGAL CONSEQUENCE.

ANN KNEW PERFECTLY WELL THAT THIS PLANK WAS A SOP TO THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT, AND SHE LOVED TO POINT OUT THAT REAGAN WOULD GIVE THE SOCIAL CONSERVATIVES LIP SERVICE BUT NEVER DO A THING TO IMPLEMENT THEIR AGENDA. THIS IS NO SURPRISE WHEN YOU CONSIDER THAT REAGAN WAS THE FIRST PRESIDENT WHO HAD BEEN DIVORCED, THE FIRST PRESIDENT TO BE A UNION PRESIDENT, AND WHOSE BACKGROUND WAS HOLLYWOOD, NOT PEORIA.



ANYWAY, ANN LOBBIED THE DEMOCRATS AND PRO-CHOICE REPUBLICANS IN THE HOUSE TO PASS THE AMENDMENT AND HAVE A VOTE ON THE HOUSE FLOOR; IT WOULD SHOW EVERYONE WHERE THESE PRO-LIFERS REALLY STOOD AND WOULD MAKE UTTER FOOLS OF THEM IN THE PROCESS. HENRY HYDE, THEN CHAIRMAN OF THE HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE, WAS LIVID AND KILLED THE BILL. BUT THOSE WERE THE KIND OF GUERRILLA TACTICS I ADORED.



I USED TO ARGUE WITH ANN ALL THE TIME AND SHE REALLY ENCOURAGED IT. SHE ENJOYED THE PHILOSOPHICAL BACK AND FORTH, THAT KIND OF INTELLECTUAL, BARE-KNUCKLE BRAWLING. ONE TIME MARK ROZELL, MY POLI-SCI PROFESSOR, ACTUALLY CALLED AND ASKED TO SPEAK TO HER. I WAS WORKING THE PHONE AT THE TIME AND TOLD HIM "HELLO."



THE WEASEL TOLD ANN THAT HE WAS SURPRISED TO HEAR ME ON THE PHONE, THAT I WAS A "DIFFICULT" STUDENT AND SHE SHOULDN'T HAVE HIRED ME AS AN INTERN.

WELL, WE THINK MIKE'S GREAT, AND WE LIKE THE FACT THAT HE SPEAKS HIS MIND!

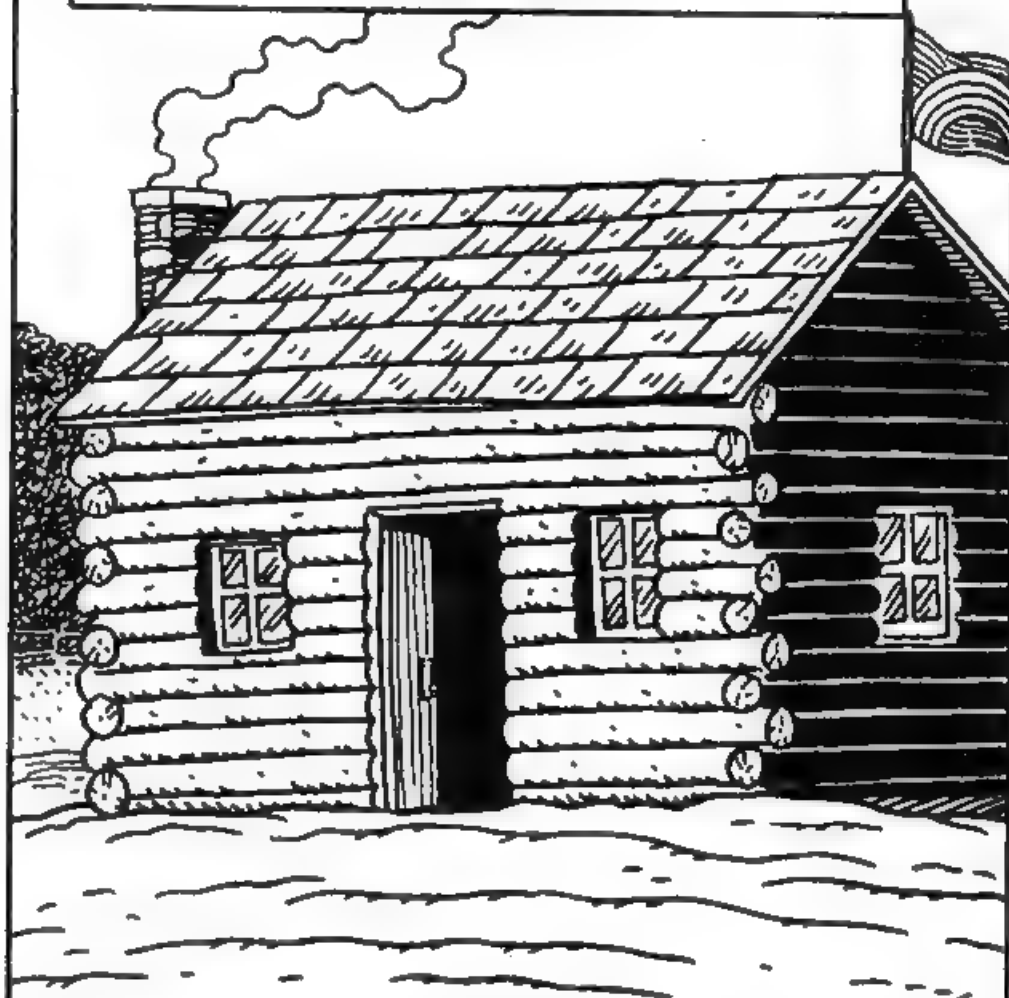


LATER ANN TOOK ME TO A MEETING OF A GROUP CALLED REPUBLICAN MAIN STREET, WHICH IS AN UMBRELLA FOR ALL THE LEFT WING GOP GROUPS. ANN WARNED ME TO BITE MY TONGUE BEFOREHAND, THAT THESE PEOPLE WERE REALLY "OUT THERE." I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY SOMEONE WHO IS A LIBERAL WOULD ALIGN THEMSELVES WITH THE REPUBLICAN PARTY.



ANYWAY, ONE WOMAN SAT DOWN NEXT TO ME FROM A REPUBLICAN ENVIRONMENTALIST GROUP. SHE ASKED MY NAME AND THEN TOLD ME IT SOUNDED FAMILIAR. I TOLD HER SHE COULDN'T POSSIBLY HAVE HEARD IT, BUT SHE INSISTED. ANN LATER POINTED OUT THAT THIS WAS HER WAY OF SURREPTITIOUSLY GETTING MY RESUME AND FIGURING OUT IF I WERE IMPORTANT. CRAFTY.

THE LOG CABIN REPUBLICANS (GAY REPUBLICANS) WERE THERE TOO. I KNEW THE VP BECAUSE HE USED TO COME HEAR SPEAKERS AT CATO (WHERE THERE WAS A BIT OF A GAY LIBERTARIAN MAFIA).



I THOUGHT IT WAS A MISTAKE TO ALIGN THEMSELVES WITH SUCH MARGINALIZED ORGANIZATIONS, LIKE REPUBLICANS FOR SOCIALIZED HEALTH CARE OR WHAT NOT, BECAUSE CIVIL LIBERTIES AND SECURITY IN ONE'S PERSON ARE ISSUES THAT CUT ACROSS ALL POLITICS AND THAT EVEN THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT CAN FEEL SYMPATHY TOWARDS.

WASHINGTON IS A VERY, VERY INCESTUOUS TOWN, AND IF YOU BELONG TO A POLITICAL PERSUASION YOU EITHER KNOW OR ARE ONE DEGREE REMOVED FROM EVERYONE IN THAT PERSUASION. MY FORMER BOSS AT CATO, DOUG BANDOW, INVITED ME TO A PARTY AT HIS PLACE. DOUG IS EXTREMELY RELIGIOUS. I REMEMBER ASKING HIM IF HE THOUGHT, AS A LIBERTARIAN, THAT LUCIFER WAS LEADING A JUST REVOLT AGAINST AN EVIL, OPPRESSIVE AUTHORITY. HE DIDN'T, BUT HE LAUGHED.





DAVID BOAZ, CATO'S VP, GAVE ME A RIDE TO DOUG'S HOUSE.

I WAS TELLING HIM HOW I WATCHED A TAPE OF ANN ON "LARRY KING" LIVE FROM A FEW YEARS BACK WHERE SHE DEBATED THIS WOMAN NAMED BETSY HART. BETSY USED TO WORK AT THE HERITAGE FOUNDATION, WHICH IS A CONSERVATIVE THINK TANK. THERE IS AN UNEASY ALLIANCE BETWEEN CATO AND HERITAGE, BUT THEY THINK WE'RE NUTS. HERITAGE IS FOR THE GOVERNMENT GIVING TAX CREDITS FOR HAVING KIDS AND LESS SMUT, THINGS LIKE THAT.



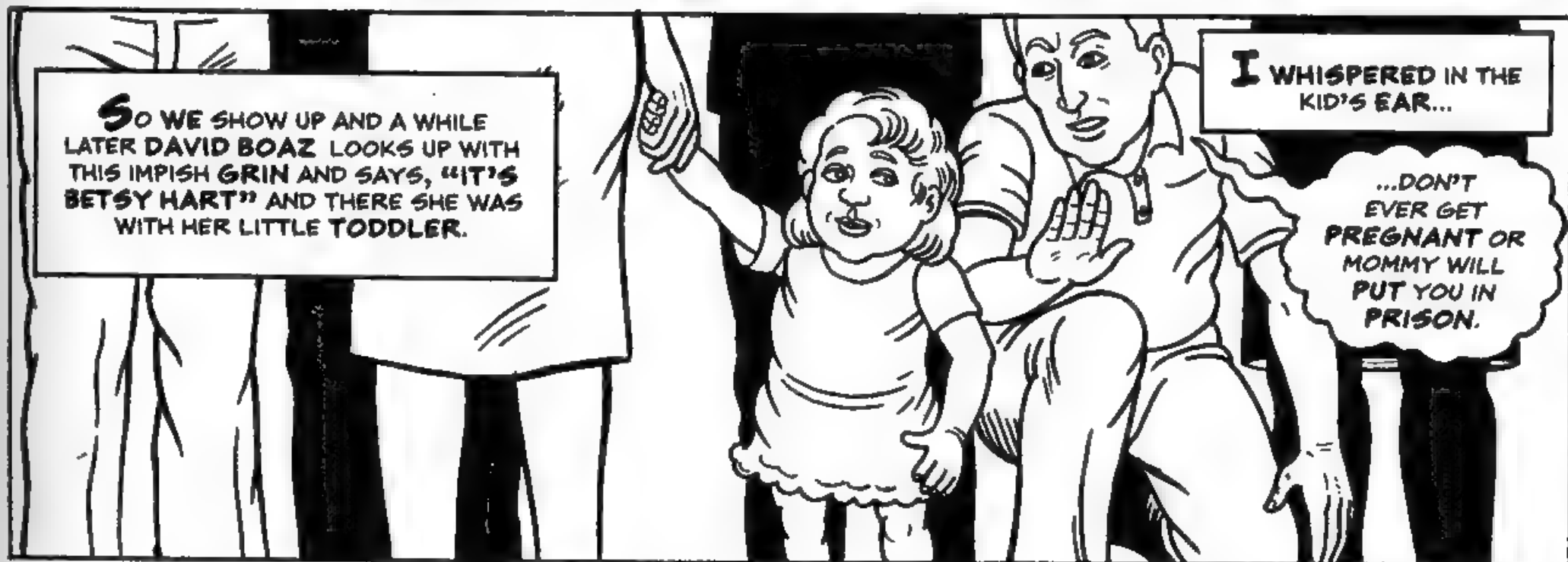
RUMOR HAD IT THAT AFTER THE 1992 ELECTION BETSY ONCE WALKED AROUND WITH BUSH'S HEAD ON A PLATTER AS A JOKE. (BUSH SR. WAS NOT LOVED AT HERITAGE OR, ESPECIALLY, CATO.)



ANYWAY, THE ARGUMENT BETWEEN BETSY AND ANN GOT VERY HEATED ON KING. BETSY ADMITTED THAT IF SHE HAD A DAUGHTER WHO WANTED AN ABORTION SHE'D CALL THE COPS AND WAS SNIPING AT ANN. ANN QUIPPED:

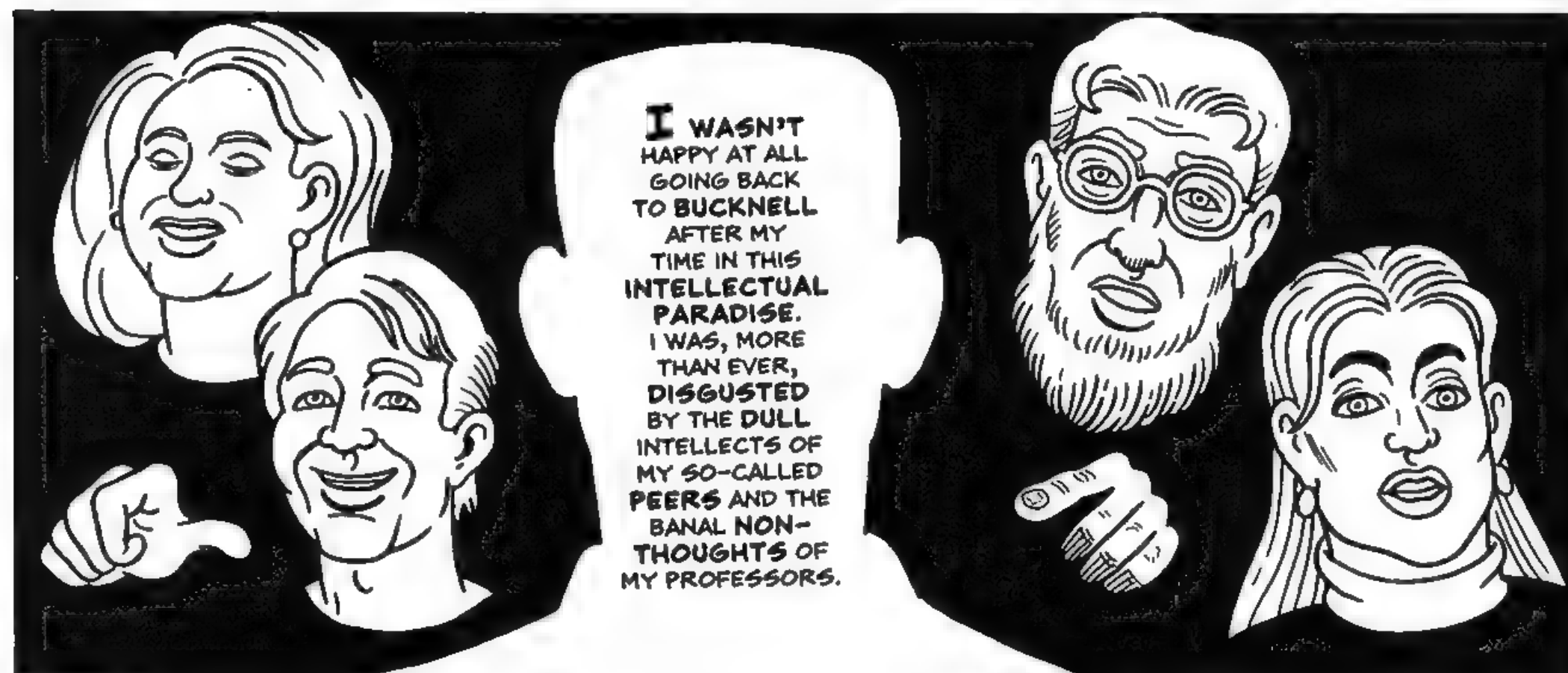
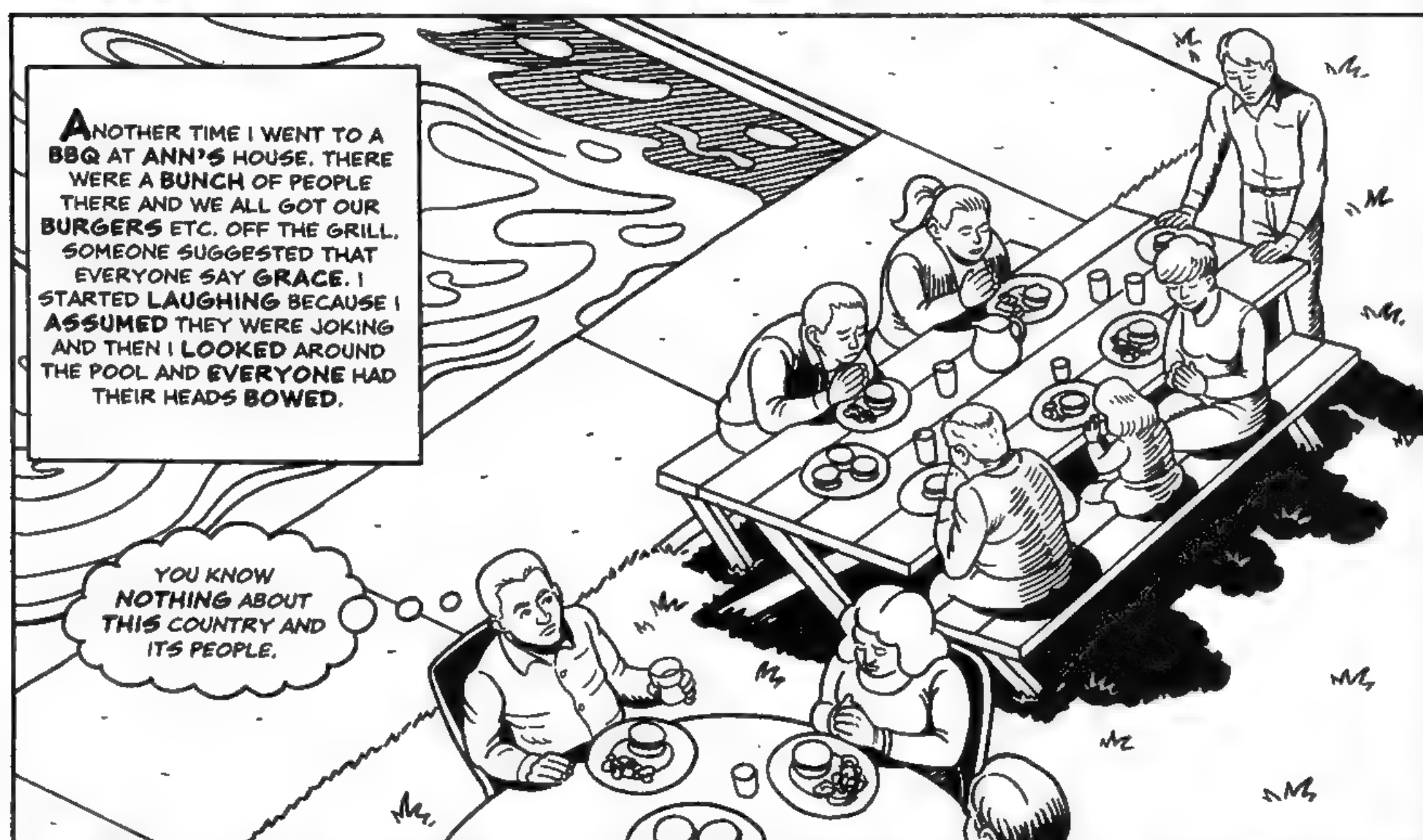


SO WE SHOW UP AND A WHILE LATER DAVID BOAZ LOOKS UP WITH THIS IMPISH GRIN AND SAYS, "IT'S BETSY HART" AND THERE SHE WAS WITH HER LITTLE TODDLER.

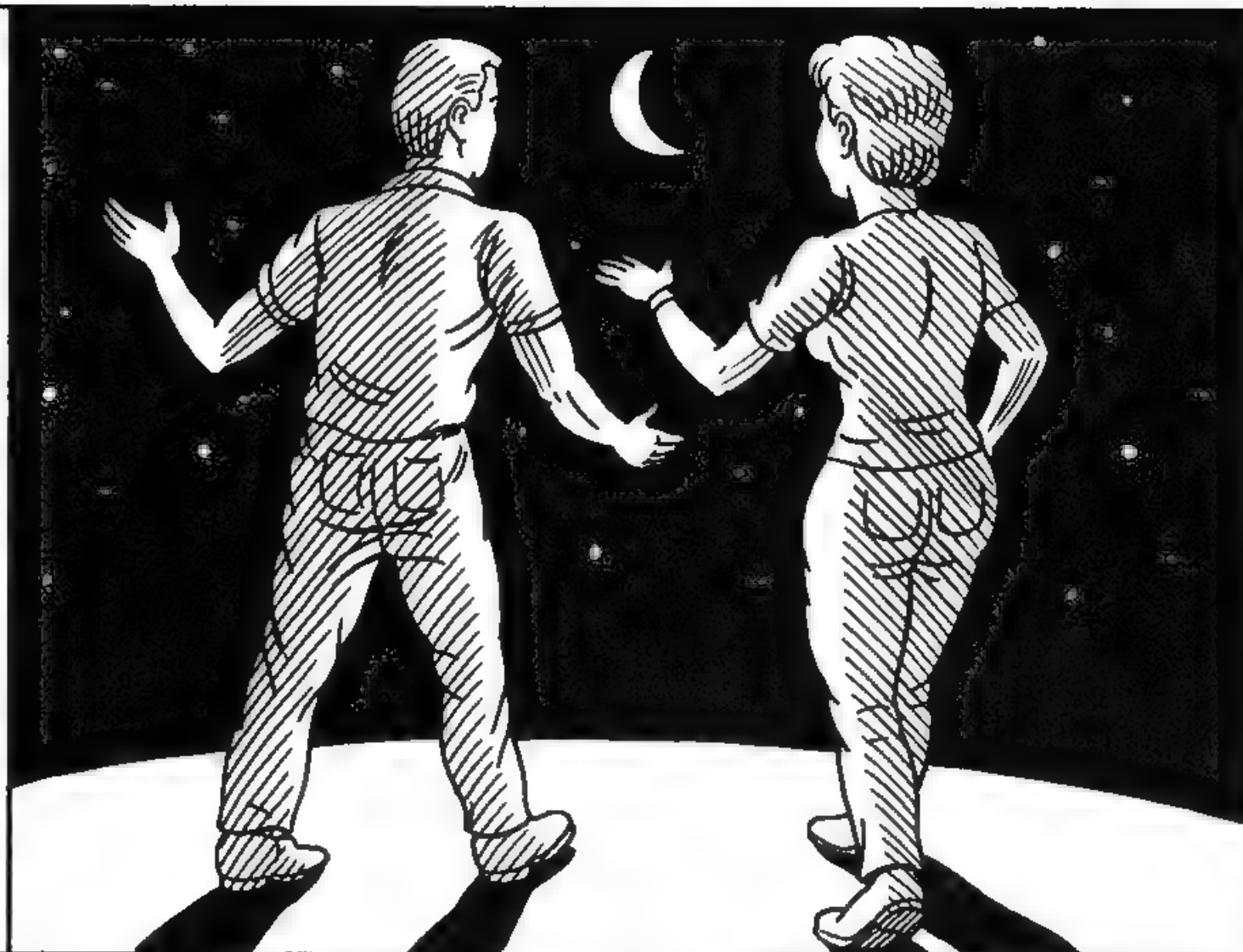


I WHISPERED IN THE KID'S EAR...

...DON'T EVER GET PREGNANT OR MOMMY WILL PUT YOU IN PRISON.



I DID GO OUT WITH MY FIRST REAL GIRLFRIEND, CHRISTY COYLE. SHE WAS VERY ATTRACTED TO MY INTELLIGENCE AND I TAUGHT HER A LOT ABOUT POLITICS AND PHILOSOPHY. I EVEN GOT HER TO RENOUNCE CHRIST, WHICH DIDN'T SIT WELL WITH HER IRISH-CATHOLIC FAMILY BUT HER DAD AND I GOT ALONG SWIMMINGLY DESPITE THAT. SHE INTERNED AT CATO AFTER I DID.



SENIOR YEAR WE HAD TO WRITE AN ESSAY SO THEY COULD FIND AN ADVISOR FOR US (I WAS STILL A BUSINESS MAJOR.) I'VE LOOKED THROUGH MY PAPERS AND FOUND WHAT I HAD WRITTEN:

When considering who is to be my advisor, please look for an advisor who is a strong believer in capitalism (if there are any in the department). This automatically precludes Professor John Miller and Professor Tammy Hiller, and no doubt many others. This also precludes any professor registered in the Democrat party or any other pro-fascist organization.

*Thank you very much.
P.S. If I am assigned Professor Miller I will burn this school down.*



PROFESSOR MILLER WAS A TRUE VILLAIN, ONE OF THESE IVORY-TOWER TYPES WHO THINK THEY KNOW A THING ABOUT THE REAL WORLD AND FEEL COMFORTABLE TELLING PEOPLE HOW THEY **SHOULD** RUN THEIR LIVES. HE TAUGHT INTRODUCTION TO MANAGEMENT. THE CLASS WAS STRUCTURED SUCH THAT IT WAS A BUSINESS THAT ACTUALLY PRODUCED A PRODUCT. THE STUDENTS ELECTED A BOARD. NOW, HAVING A COMPANY RUN BY WORKERS IS (PHILOSOPHICAL) SOCIALISM. NOW SOCIALISM IS ALL WELL AND GOOD, BUT TO CALL IT A BUSINESS IS A COMPLETE FRAUD.

EFFECTIVENESS EFFICIENCY COMMUNITY

HE ALSO TAUGHT THAT THREE EQUAL ELEMENTS OF A COMPANY ARE EFFECTIVENESS, EFFICIENCY AND COMMUNITY. THIS IS PATENTLY ABSURD, A PRIORI. ANY DECISION-MAKING UNIT MUST MAKE A HIERARCHY OF ITS PRIORITIES, OR ELSE IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO MAKE A CHOICE BETWEEN ALTERNATIVE VALUES.

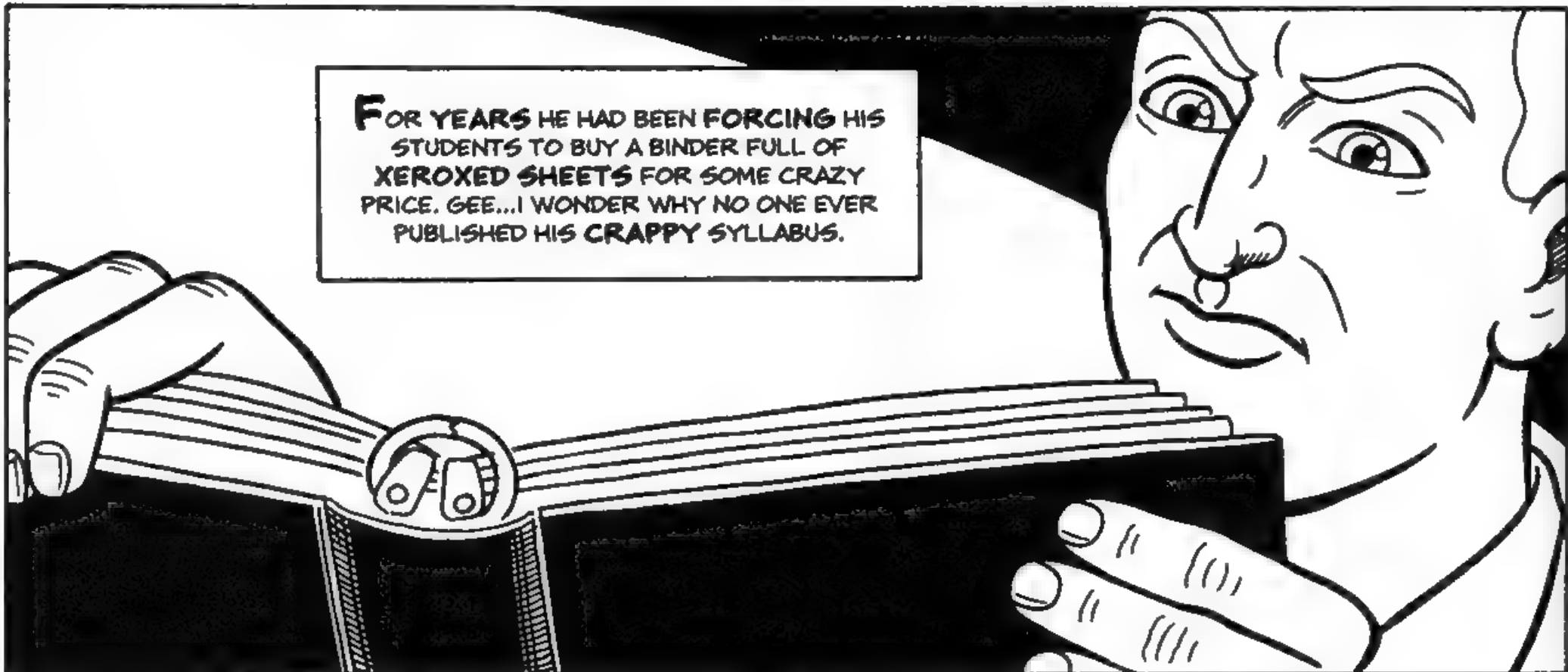


AND NO BUSINESS CAN POSSIBLY EQUATE HAPPY WORKERS (COMMUNITY) WITH PROFIT (EFFECTIVENESS).



HAPPY WORKERS ARE MUCH MORE PRODUCTIVE WORKERS AND HENCE CONTRIBUTE TO PROFIT, BUT NO ORGANIZATION IS FORMED FOR THE IDEA OF PLEASING ITS EMPLOYEES.

FOR YEARS HE HAD BEEN FORCING HIS STUDENTS TO BUY A BINDER FULL OF XEROXED SHEETS FOR SOME CRAZY PRICE. GEE...I WONDER WHY NO ONE EVER PUBLISHED HIS CRAPPY SYLLABUS.



THE PROFESSOR I WAS ASSIGNED AS MY FACULTY ADVISOR WAS BILL GRUVER, WHO USED TO BE A SENIOR PARTNER AT GOLDMAN SACHS AND WAS RUMORED TO BE WORTH \$150,000,000. DURING SENIOR YEAR ALL MY BUSINESS MAJOR BUDDIES WERE SCRAMBLING TO FIND JOBS AT BIG CORPORATIONS WHO CAME RECRUITING ON CAMPUS, BUT I WASN'T HAVING ANY OF IT.



I KNEW I WOULD NOT FIT AT THOSE PLACES, AND I HAD NO IDEA WHAT TO DO WITH MY LIFE. BUT I DID KNOW I DIDN'T WANT TO BE CHAINED TO SOME DESK FOR 40 HOURS A WEEK DOING SOMETHING MIND-NUMBINGLY BORING.

PROFESSOR GRUVER MET ME, AND WE HIT IT OFF RIGHT AWAY. AFTER TALKING TO HIM A FEW MINUTES HE WAS CONFUSED.

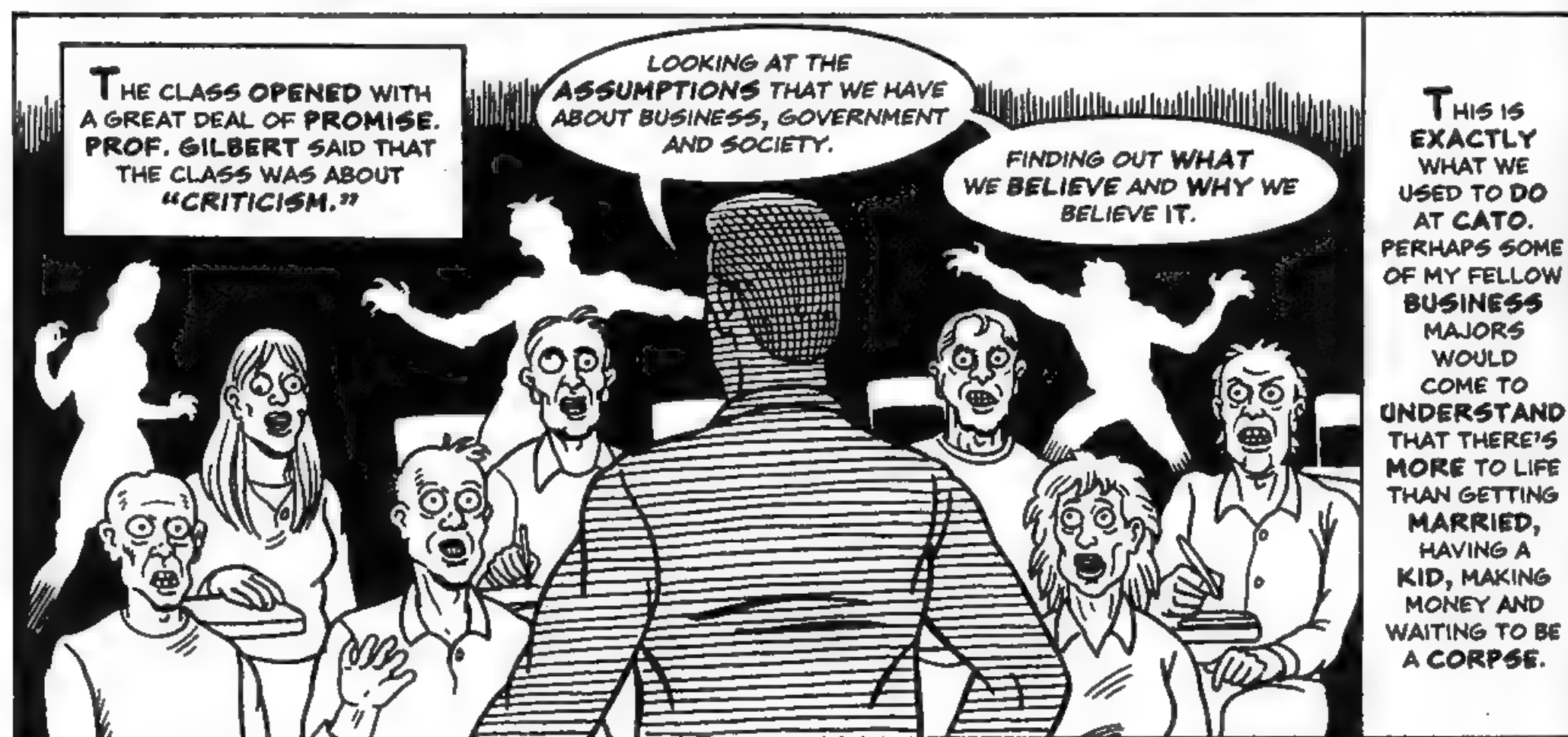
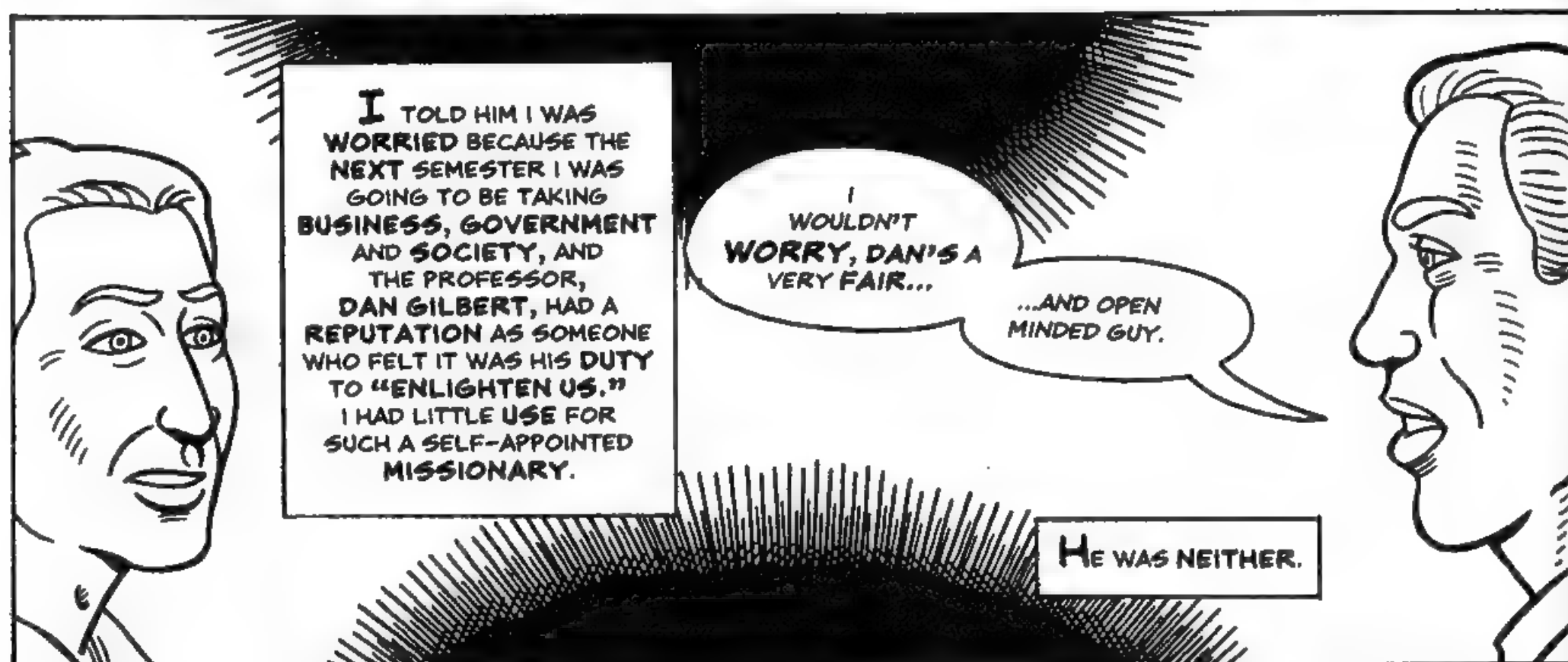


WHY
ARE YOU A
BUSINESS MAJOR,
THEN?

I THINK
A DEGREE IS JUST A
PIECE OF PAPER.

I
THINK THAT
MOST OF WHAT YOU
LEARN IN COLLEGE IS
NONSENSE, AND IT'S ONLY
WHEN YOU GET INTO THE REAL
WORLD THAT YOU GET A
SENSE OF HOW THINGS
REALLY ARE.

...BUT
WE LIVE IN A
CREDENTIALIST SOCIETY,
AND A BUSINESS DEGREE IS WHAT
IS GOING TO MAKE THINGS
EASIEST FOR ME.



THE CLASS WAS NOT AS ADVERTISED. WHAT HE MEANT BY CRITICISM WAS HIS CONVINCING US THAT BUSINESSES HAVE "DUTIES," THE ORIGIN OF WHICH NO ONE BOTHERS TO EXPLAIN. I DIDN'T ARGUE WITH HIM BECAUSE I KNEW THAT BEHIND HIS WEAK, QUIVERING EYES THERE WAS NO ONE THERE.



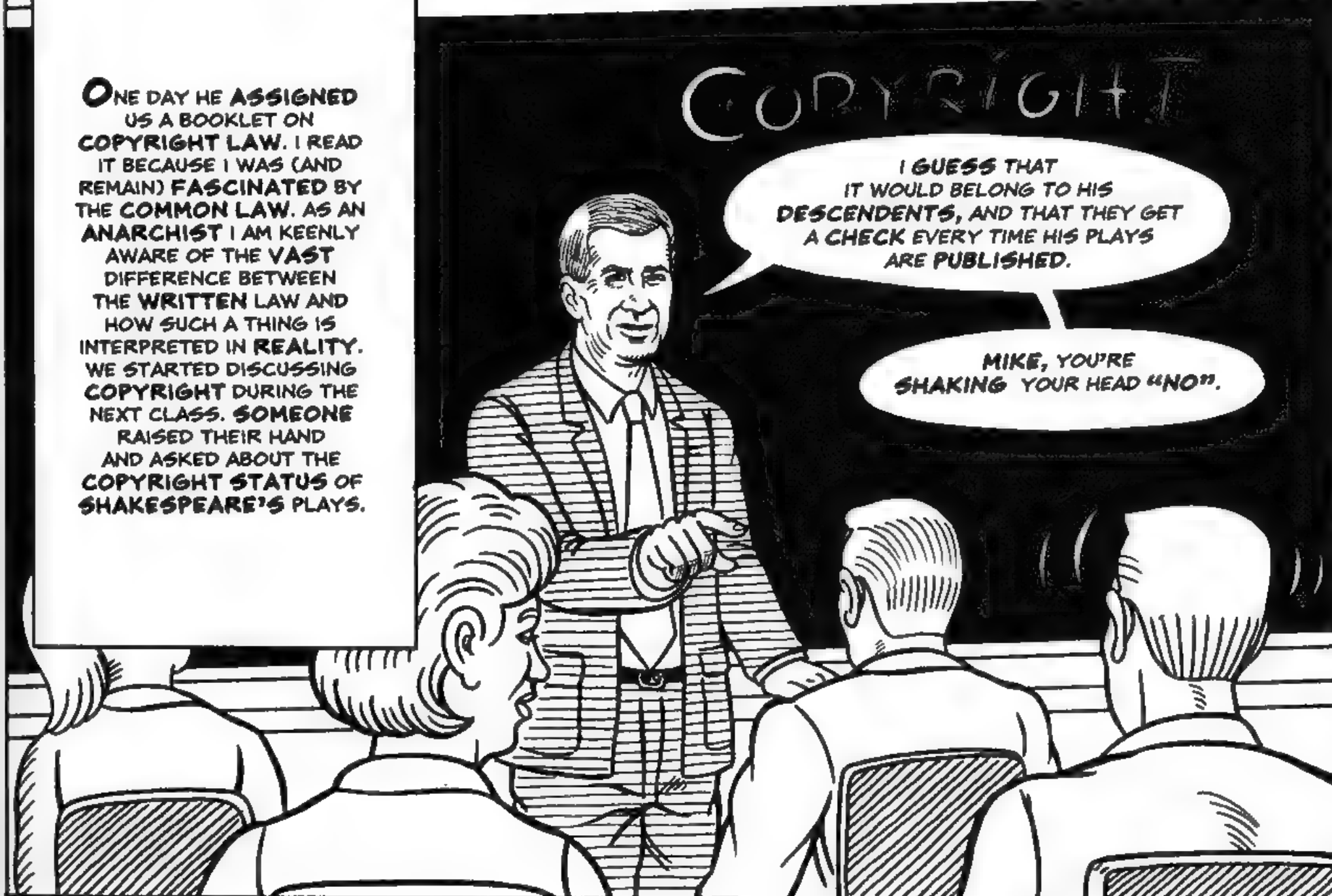
HE WASN'T A MAN, BUT A TAPE RECORDER, REPEATING CATCH PHRASES AND OLD SLOGANS WITHOUT ANY THOUGHT TO THE CONCEPTS BEHIND THEM, A DOG STUCK IN THE TRAINING OF HIS YOUTH AND FAITHFULLY EXECUTING HIS TASKS LONG AFTER HIS MASTER HAD MOVED ON.

ONE DAY HE ASSIGNED US A BOOKLET ON COPYRIGHT LAW. I READ IT BECAUSE I WAS (AND REMAIN) FASCINATED BY THE COMMON LAW. AS AN ANARCHIST I AM KEENLY AWARE OF THE VAST DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE WRITTEN LAW AND HOW SUCH A THING IS INTERPRETED IN REALITY. WE STARTED DISCUSSING COPYRIGHT DURING THE NEXT CLASS. SOMEONE RAISED THEIR HAND AND ASKED ABOUT THE COPYRIGHT STATUS OF SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS.

COPYRIGHT

I GUESS THAT IT WOULD BELONG TO HIS DESCENDENTS, AND THAT THEY GET A CHECK EVERY TIME HIS PLAYS ARE PUBLISHED.

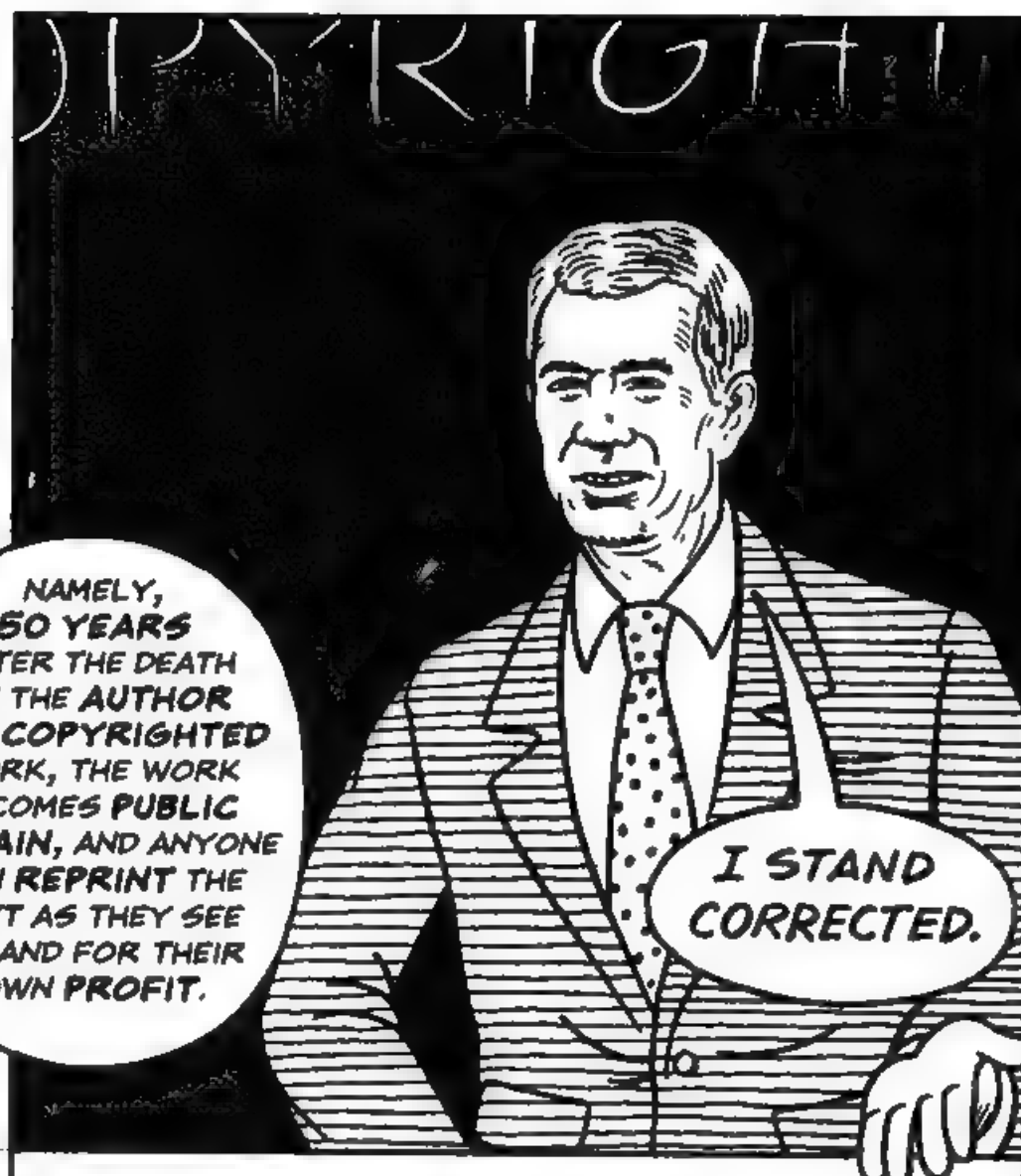
MIKE, YOU'RE SHAKING YOUR HEAD "NO".



I WAS BESIDE MYSELF. CLEARLY NO ONE IN THE CLASS OTHER THAN ME HAD READ THE PAMPHLET WE WERE ASSIGNED. FURTHER, NOT ONLY HAD GILBERT NOT READ IT, BUT HE DIDN'T KNOW A SINGLE THING ABOUT COPYRIGHT LAW OTHER THAN THE POLITICAL AGENDA HE WAS PUSHING ON US. ONE OF THE MOST BASIC FACTS ABOUT PUBLISHING IS THE ISSUE OF PUBLIC DOMAIN.



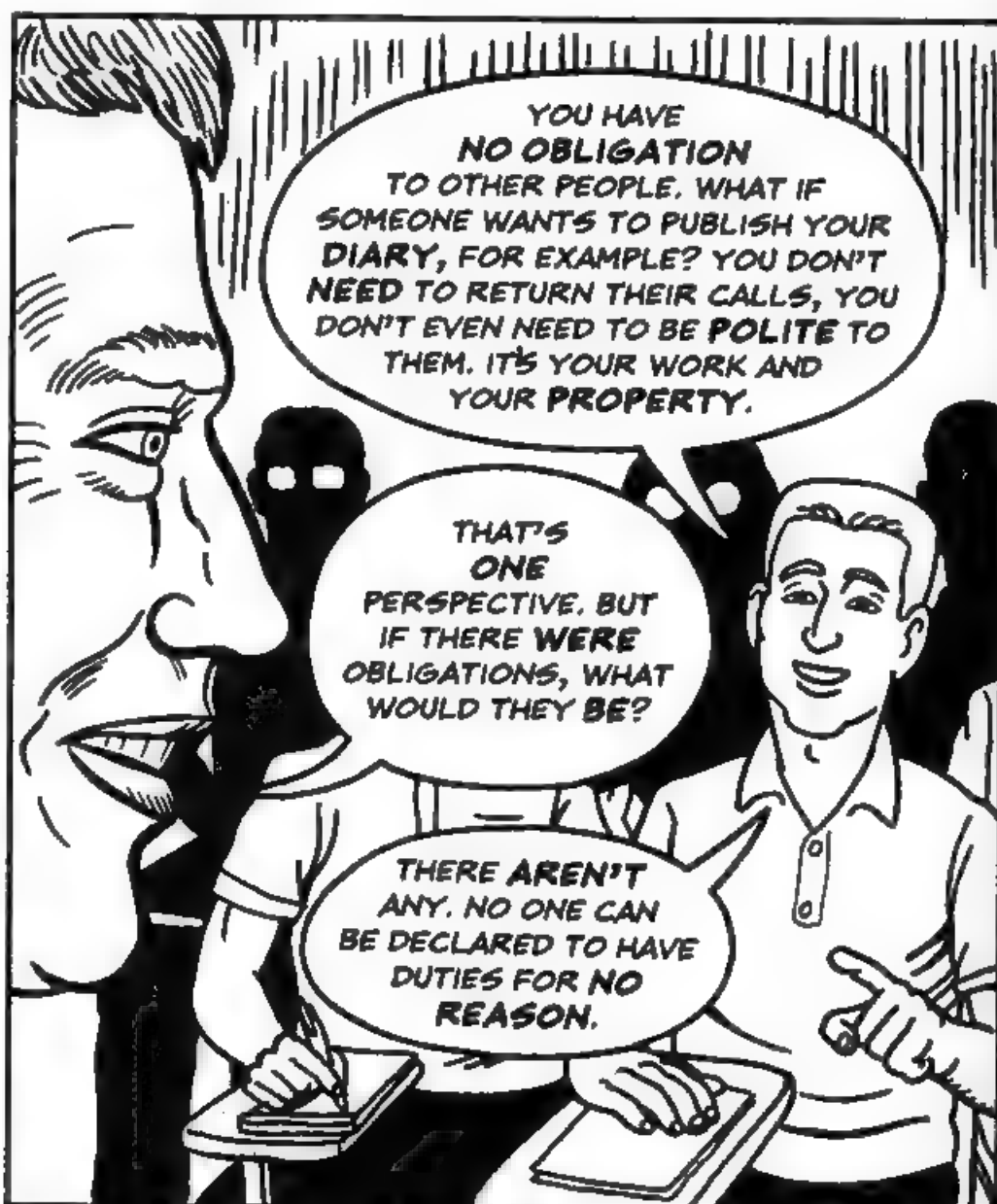
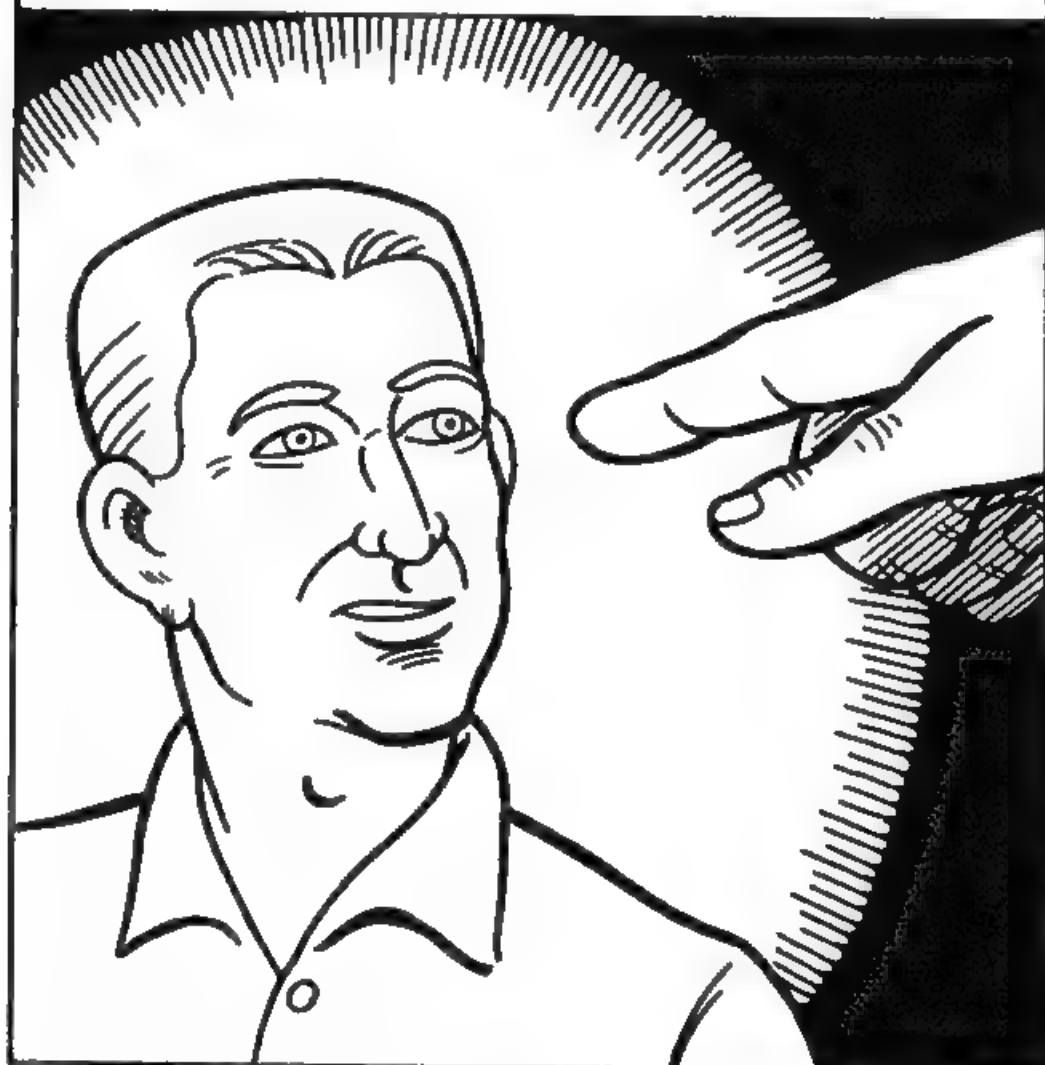
NAMELY, 50 YEARS AFTER THE DEATH OF THE AUTHOR OF A COPYRIGHTED WORK, THE WORK BECOMES PUBLIC DOMAIN, AND ANYONE CAN REPRINT THE TEXT AS THEY SEE FIT AND FOR THEIR OWN PROFIT.



I STAND CORRECTED.

OF COURSE NO TEACHER WANTS TO LOOK LIKE AN ASSHOLE IN FRONT OF HIS CLASS BUT THIS WAS AN INSTANCE WHERE IT WOULD HAVE BEEN EMINENTLY AVOIDABLE FOR HIM HAD HE ONLY READ HIS OWN ASSIGNMENT.

THE NEXT CLASS WE HAD A DISCUSSION ABOUT OBLIGATION. THE ISSUE WAS WHAT OBLIGATION TWO PEOPLE HAD TO EACH OTHER, ONE BEING A COPYRIGHT HOLDER AND THE OTHER BEING A POTENTIAL PUBLISHER. IT WAS AGREED THAT THE PUBLISHER HAD TO PRINT THE WORK AS WRITTEN, ETC., ETC. THEN HE ASKED WHAT OBLIGATIONS THE COPYRIGHT HOLDER HAD. NO ONE HAD ANYTHING TO SAY, AS USUAL, IN THE CLASS, SO HE CALLED ON ME.



YOU HAVE NO OBLIGATION TO OTHER PEOPLE. WHAT IF SOMEONE WANTS TO PUBLISH YOUR DIARY, FOR EXAMPLE? YOU DON'T NEED TO RETURN THEIR CALLS, YOU DON'T EVEN NEED TO BE POLITE TO THEM. IT'S YOUR WORK AND YOUR PROPERTY.

THAT'S ONE PERSPECTIVE. BUT IF THERE WERE OBLIGATIONS, WHAT WOULD THEY BE?

THERE AREN'T ANY. NO ONE CAN BE DECLARED TO HAVE DUTIES FOR NO REASON.

THIS WENT ON FOR FIVE MINUTES AND NO VOICES WERE RAISED. THIS IS HARD TO BELIEVE IN LIGHT OF WHAT HAPPENED NEXT, BUT FORTUNATELY I HAD A CLASSROOM OF WITNESSES.

THE NEXT TIME WE HAD CLASS HE WAS WAITING FOR ME ON THE BENCH OUTSIDE THE ROOM. HE HANDED ME AN ENVELOPE...

READ IT

...HE ORDERED. I SAT DOWN BESIDE HIM AND READ THE FOLLOWING:



Michael,

I make it a point to elucidate the intellectual foundation for MG312; however, the foundation and the premises behind it are not up for discussion. It is my understanding that your statements in class on Monday are an indication that you have hesitations about that foundation. Apparently you have reached a significant, imminent decision point.

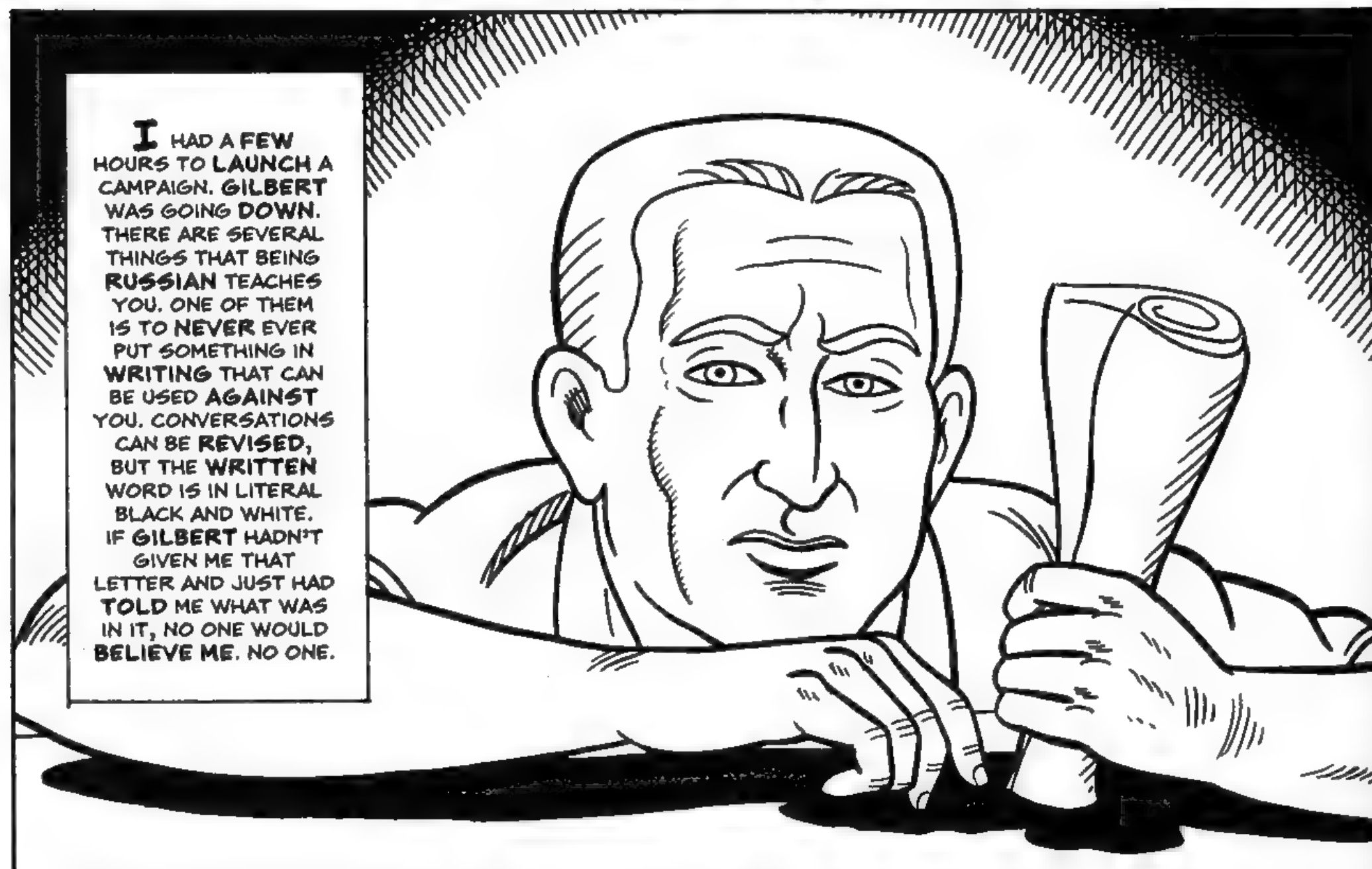
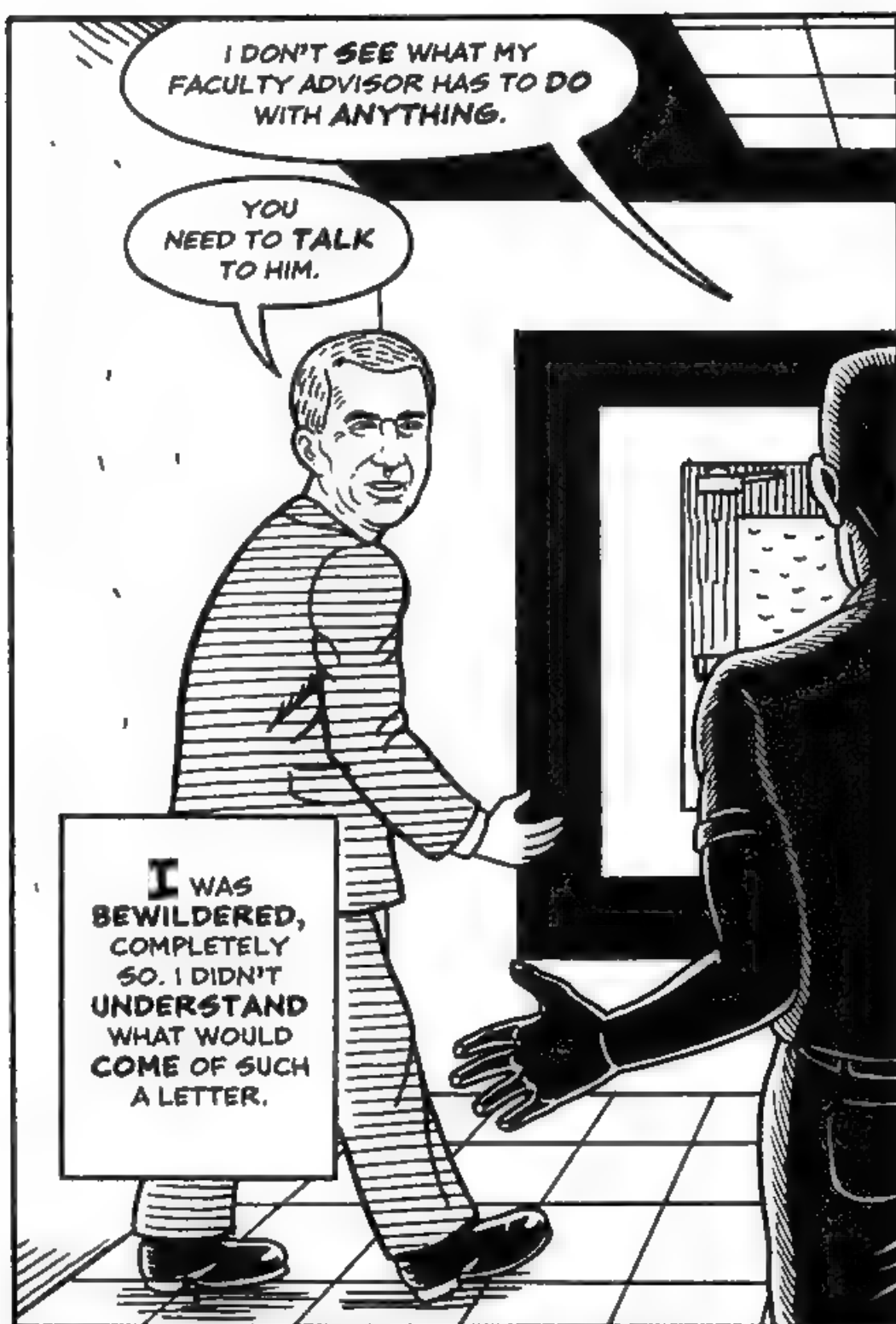
If you think some "cooling off" time away from the course is necessary, I will oblige. Discussing the matter with your faculty advisor is encouraged.

Until we've spoken at length outside the class, I will not permit you the privilege of being a party to the class conversation.

Concerned,

Daniel R. Gilbert Jr.
Associate Professor of Management

Ironically, copyright law prevents us from reprinting the whole letter in its original form. The text above is largely paraphrased, but true to the tone and intent of the original. -Ed.

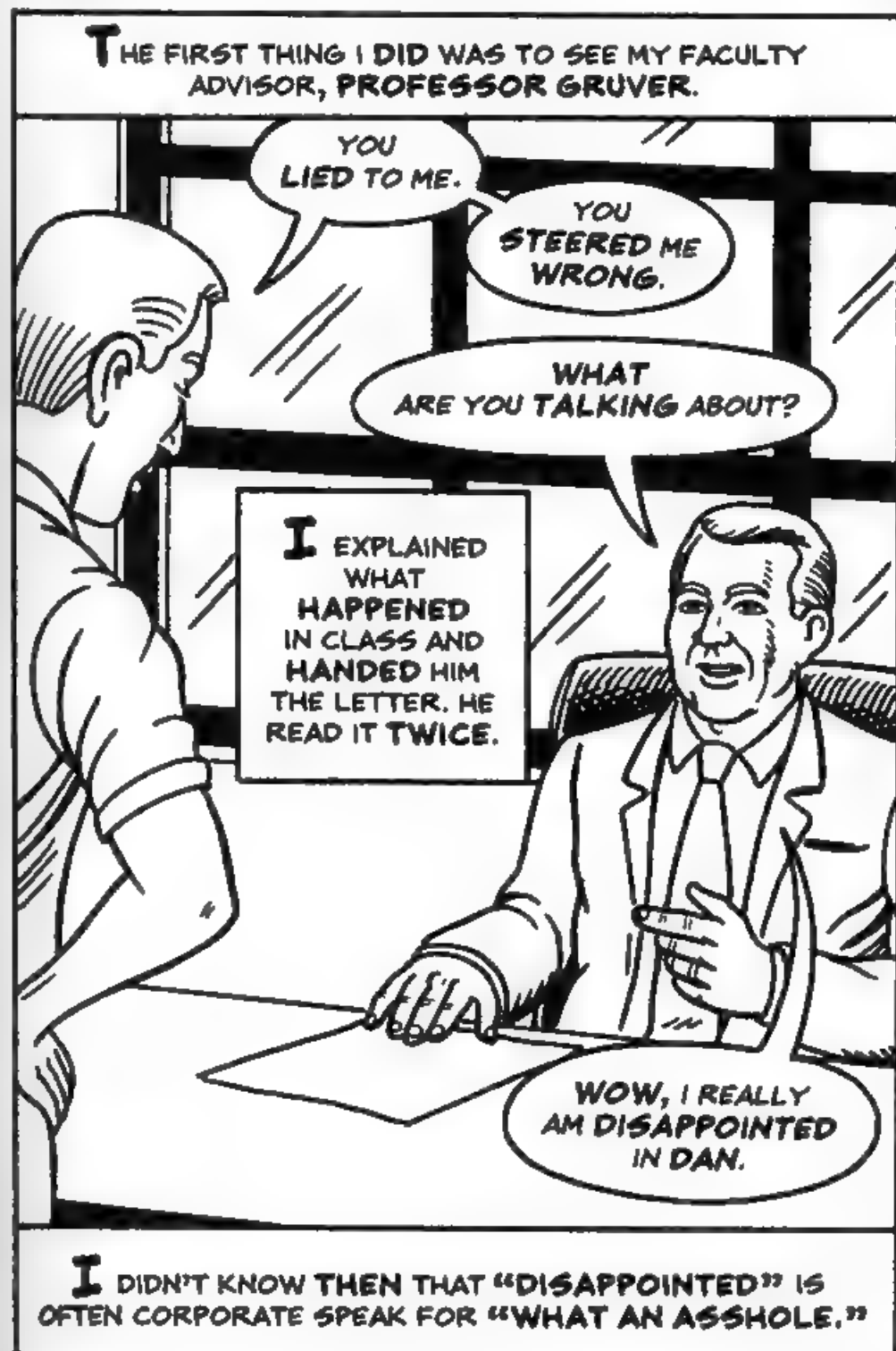




BY THE WAY, HERE'S A LETTER FROM A GIRL I KNEW IN THE CLASS;

"TO SAY I WAS SHOCKED WOULD BE AN UNDERSTATEMENT. I CAN'T REALLY BELIEVE THAT A PROFESSOR WOULD WRITE THAT TO YOU. I WAS PRESENT FOR THE DISCUSSION AND WHILE I FELT THAT YOU MIGHT HAVE BEEN SLIGHTLY DIFFICULT, THAT IN NO WAY WARRANTED THAT LETTER. NOT ONLY IS IT NOT FAIR FOR A PROFESSOR TO ALMOST SHUT YOU OUT OF A REQUIRED COURSE, BUT TO SAY YOU AREN'T ALLOWED TO EXPRESS YOURSELF...

WHAT COUNTRY ARE WE IN? I SOMETIMES FORGET. THE RULES STILL APPLY WITHIN THE BUCKNELL BUBBLE, RIGHT?"



THE FIRST THING I DID WAS TO SEE MY FACULTY ADVISOR, PROFESSOR GRUVER.

YOU LIED TO ME.

YOU STEERED ME WRONG.

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

I EXPLAINED WHAT HAPPENED IN CLASS AND HANDED HIM THE LETTER. HE READ IT TWICE.

WOW, I REALLY AM DISAPPOINTED IN DAN.

I DIDN'T KNOW THEN THAT "DISAPPOINTED" IS OFTEN CORPORATE SPEAK FOR "WHAT AN ASSHOLE."



YOU DON'T GET TO BE A SENIOR PARTNER AT GOLDMAN, SACHS WITHOUT BEING FLUENT IN INTERPERSONAL POLITICS.

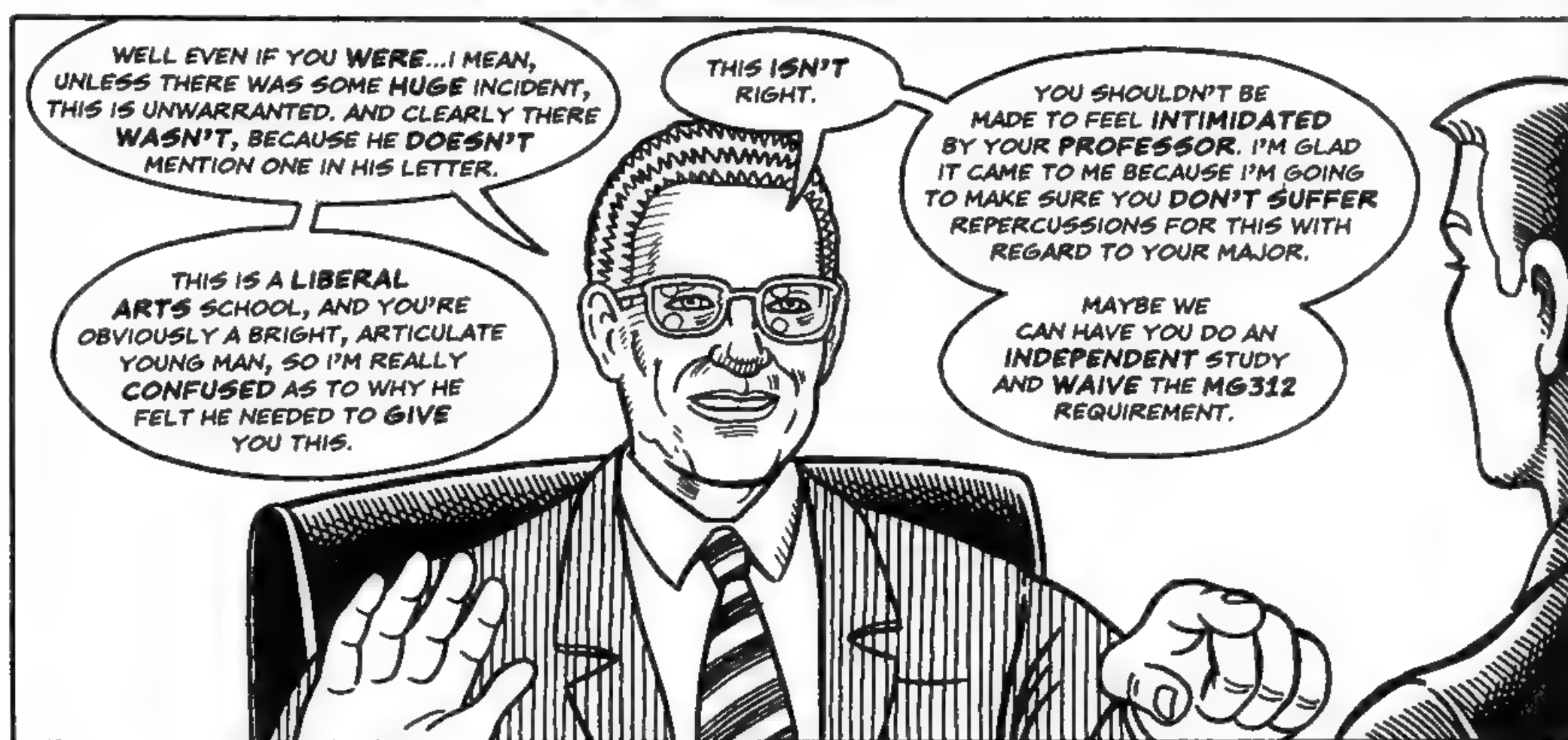
HE PROBABLY WANTED ME TO POINT OUT TO YOU THAT YOU NEED MG312 TO GRADUATE WITH A BUSINESS MAJOR.

AND THAT HE'S THE ONLY ONE THAT TEACHES IT.

WHAT SHOULD I DO?

LOOK, YOU NEED TO GO SPEAK TO THE HEAD OF THE BUSINESS DEPARTMENT ABOUT THIS. I CAN'T REALLY DO ANYTHING.

GRUVER GOT ON THE PHONE AND GOT ME AN APPOINTMENT FOR AN HOUR LATER.





I'M
MEETING WITH HIM AT
7:00.

OH,
I'LL GET A HOLD
OF HIM BEFORE THEN.
TRUST ME.

I'LL
CALL HIM
AT HOME IF I
HAVE TO.

SO, I WENT TO HIS OFFICE THAT DAY. GILBERT WAS ALL KINDS OF HOT AND BOTHERED, ALMOST AS IF HE HAD GOTTEN A TONGUE LASHING FROM THE DEAN SOMETHING FIERCE. BUT I WAS RUSSIAN AND GILBERT WASN'T SO I WAS MUCH CRAFTIER THAN HIM.



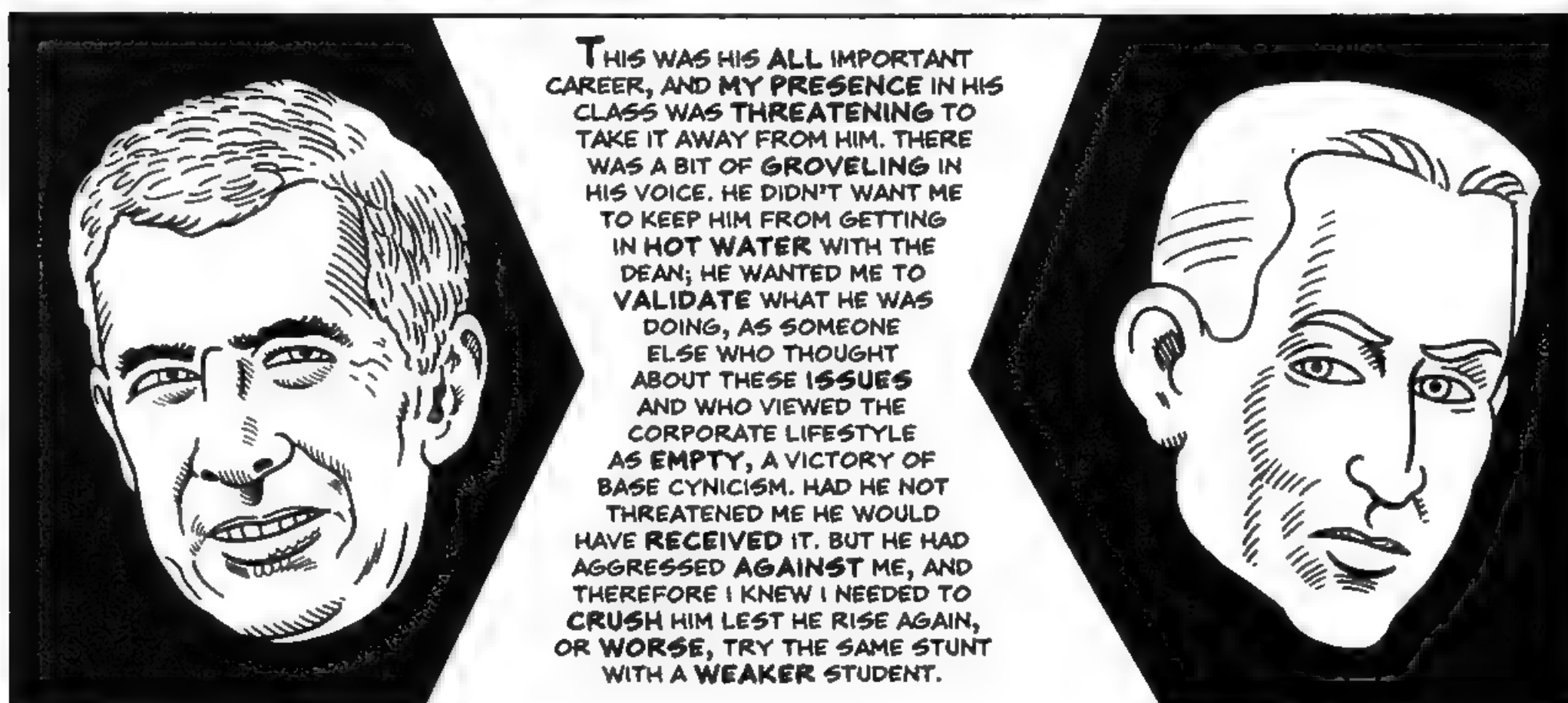
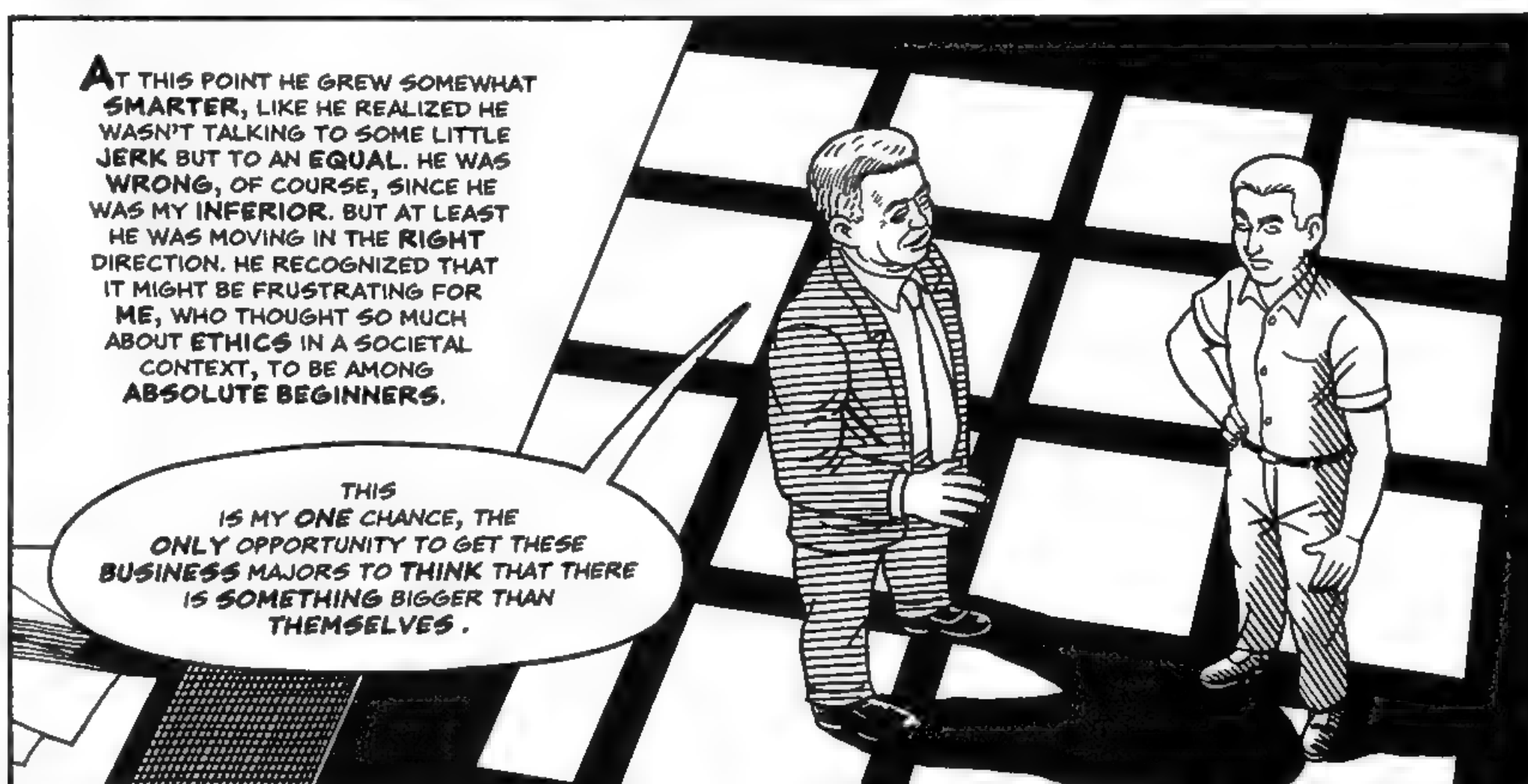
I KEPT MY POKER FACE ON AND LISTENED TO HIM WITH AN AIR OF INTEREST AND RESPECT. (I THOUGHT OF WHAT IT SAYS IN ONE OF RAND'S NOVELS, HOW THE WINNER CAN AFFORD TO BE GENEROUS.)



SO,
YOU'VE BEEN
AROUND THE WORLD
TODAY.

I'VE
BEEN SENT AROUND
THE WORLD.

WELL, MIKE,
LET ME TELL YOU A
LITTLE BIT OF WHERE I'M
COMING FROM HERE. YOU SAT
IN CLASS ALL SEMESTER, JUST
SITTING THERE AND SMIRKING
FROM MY POINT OF VIEW. AND
THEN WHEN I CHALLENGE YOU,
YOU ATTACK ME IN FRONT
OF MY WHOLE CLASS.



AFTER GIVING ME THIS LONG STORY ABOUT HIS VISION FOR THE CLASS, ALL I SAID WAS...

DID YOU TALK WITH DEAN PYPER?

IT WAS AS IF THE PRECEDING MEA CULPA HAD NEVER HAPPENED.

YES.

WHAT DID HE SAY?

FIND A WAY TO KEEP THIS KID IN CLASS.

NOT "TRY TO FIND A WAY." FIND A WAY.

SO WHAT ABOUT THIS IDEA OF AN INDEPENDENT STUDY?

APPARENTLY THE DEAN SUGGESTED THAT HE BE MY TEACHER FOR AN INDEPENDENT STUDY.

I DON'T KNOW. HOW DO I KNOW THAT YOU WON'T...

I GIVE YOU MY WORD.

I KNEW THIS WAS AS GOOD A DEAL AS I WAS LIKELY TO GET AND ALLOW HIM TO ACHIEVE HIS NEEDED GOAL OF SAVING FACE IN FRONT OF THE DEAN. I ENDED UP DOING A FEW BOOK REPORTS FOR HIM AND GOT AN "A" IN THE COURSE. HE HAD ME READ A BOOK ON A.T.&T., "BABBITT" AND "THE FINANCIER."



IN FACT, THIS COURSE TAUGHT ME MORE THAN ANY OTHER. NOT THE COURSE ITSELF, BUT THE SKILLS I LEARNED WHEN IT CAME TO POWER STRUGGLES AND DEALING WITH HOSTILITIES FROM MY ORGANIZATIONAL SUPERIORS. CLAUSEWITZ SAID THAT "WAR IS POLITICS BY OTHER MEANS," AND SO DID I LEARN THAT POLITICS IS BUT WAR BY OTHER MEANS.

I ALSO HAD A RADIO SHOW ALL THE TIME I WAS AT BUCKNELL. SENIOR YEAR IT WAS ENTITLED "RETARDED PEOPLE HAVING SEX." A PROFESSOR WENT UP TO OUR FACULTY ADVISOR, POINTED TO MY SHOW ON THE SCHEDULE AND SAID:

I DON'T KNOW WHAT THIS MEANS, BUT I FIND IT OFFENSIVE.

Retarded People Having Sex 5:00

THIS IS WHERE THINGS STOOD IN THE SPRING OF 1998. I WAS 21. I HAD A BUSINESS DEGREE AND I HAD ABSOLUTELY NO IDEA WHAT I WANTED TO DO WITH MY LIFE.

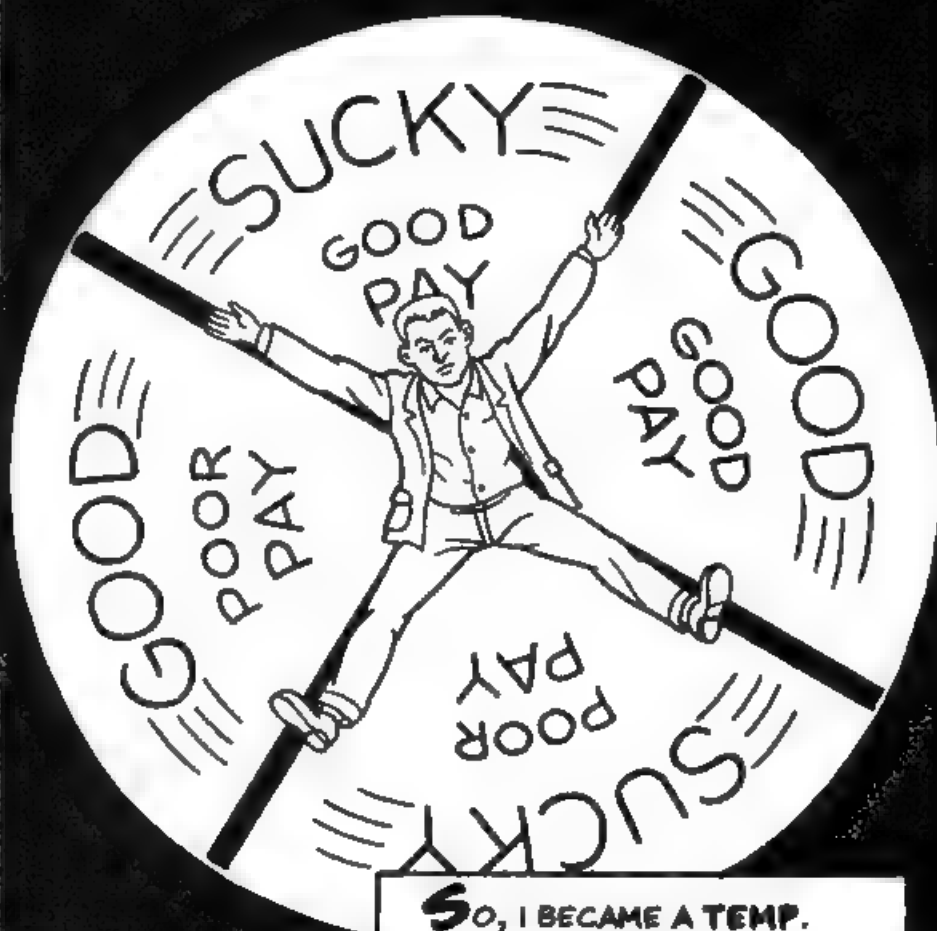


PART 2

I'M VERY PROUD OF HOW I WENT ABOUT FINDING A JOB. MOST OF MY SCHOOLMATES NABBED THE FIRST OPPORTUNITY THEY HAD. WELL, I GET BORED EXTREMELY EASILY, AND I DO NOT HAVE THE STAMINA FOR AN EIGHT HOUR DAY, LET ALONE OVERTIME. I COULDN'T BE STUCK IN ONE OFFICE DRIVING THE SAME DESK FOR YEARS.



So, I FIGURED THAT THERE WERE JOBS THAT SUCKED THAT PAID POORLY, JOBS THAT WERE GOOD THAT PAID POORLY, JOBS THAT SUCKED THAT PAID WELL AND JOBS THAT WERE GOOD THAT PAID WELL. AND LIKE A ROULETTE WHEEL, IF I SPUN AROUND IT ENOUGH I WOULD HIT A GREAT POSITION.



THIS WAS THE LATE NINTIES, AND AS A BUSINESS MAJOR THEY TAUGHT US A LOT ABOUT TEMPS AND A MOBILE WORKFORCE AS THE WAVE OF THE FUTURE. THIS IS ONLY HALF TRUE. THERE ARE TEMPS AND THERE ARE CONSULTANTS. CONSULTANTS ARE BASICALLY THE SAME AS EMPLOYEES WITH DIFFERING COMPENSATION SYSTEMS. THEY GET PAID MORE, BUT THEY DON'T GET BENEFITS AND ARE THE FIRST ONES FIRED.



AREA TEMPS

THEN THERE ARE TEMPS. TEMPS ARE REALLY THE DREGS, PEOPLE WHO ARE UNSKILLED AND JUST PLAIN BAD AT WORKING FOR WHATEVER REASON. SO WHEN I CAME TO THE TEMP AGENCIES THEY TREATED ME LIKE ROYALTY, BECAUSE IT WAS SO RARE FOR THEM TO HAVE QUALIFIED PEOPLE TO FILL ASSIGNMENTS. I WAS GETTING \$14 AN HOUR (\$25,480 PER YEAR).



MOST OF MY SCHOOLMATES WERE GETTING PAID \$30 - \$40K A YEAR, WHICH IS SOMEWHAT MORE RESPECTABLE SINCE LUNCH IS UNPAID FOR TEMPS. BUT I DIDN'T CARE. I COULD PAY MY RENT AND I WOULDN'T BE PRISONER TO A JOB.



MY NEXT ASSIGNMENT WAS AS A RECEPTIONIST FOR A GROUP OF THREE PEOPLE. THEY WERE THE ONES WHO BOUGHT ALL THE FURNITURE FOR THE BANK IN ALL ITS BRANCHES. I REALLY ENJOYED IT BECAUSE IT WAS LOW-PRESSURE AND THE PEOPLE WERE WONDERFUL.



ONE OF THEM WAS A WOMAN NAMED VESTA. I THOUGHT THIS WAS VERY COOL AND TOLD HER SO.



TO MY AMAZEMENT, SHE DID NOT KNOW THE ORIGIN OF HER HIGHLY ORIGINAL NAME. I EXPLAINED THAT VESTA WAS THE ROMAN VERSION OF HESTIA, THE GREEK GODDESS OF THE HEARTH WHO CEDED HER SEAT ON THE ENNEAD TO ATHENA. SHE WAS A RELIC OF PRIMITIVE SPIRIT WORSHIP AND AS A CONSEQUENCE THERE WAS NO REAL MYTHOLOGY AROUND HER.



OH, I'M SURE THERE'S MORE TO HER THAN THAT.



WHAT A MORON. SHE SPENDS FORTY YEARS WITH A NAME LIKE THAT AND CAN'T BE BOTHERED TO FIGURE IT OUT AND NOW SHE'S AN AUTHORITY AFTER I TELL HER.

I TOLD ALL THIS TO MY BOSS, CORINNE. CORINNE WAS COOL BECAUSE SHE USED TO GO TO STUDIO 54 WHEN SHE WAS A KID. SHE GOT KNOCKED UP AS A TEEN AND RAISED HER SON BY HERSELF. SHE TOLD ME HOW SHE STOPPED USING DRUGS.

YOU KNOW HOW WHEN YOU DO BLOW ALL NIGHT YOU GET A COKE HEADACHE IN THE MORNING?

I NODDED AS IF I HAD ANY IDEA WHAT SHE WAS TALKING ABOUT. I WAS KIND OF FLATTERED THAT SHE ASSUMED I KNEW.



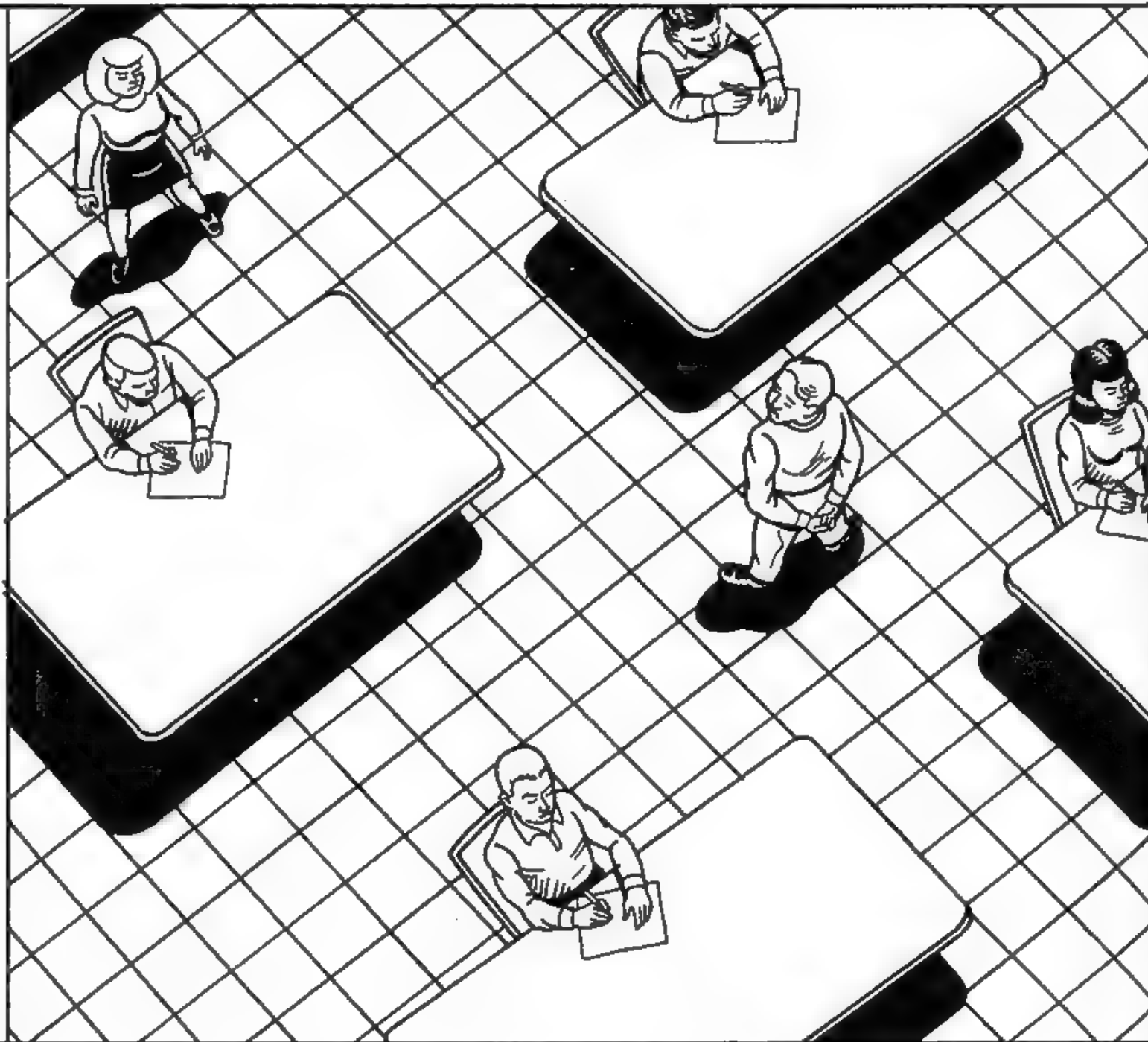
WELL, I'M PLAYING WITH MY SON THE NEXT DAY AND I CAN'T DEAL WITH HIM. AND THAT'S WHEN I REALIZED I'VE GOT TO STOP PARTYING.

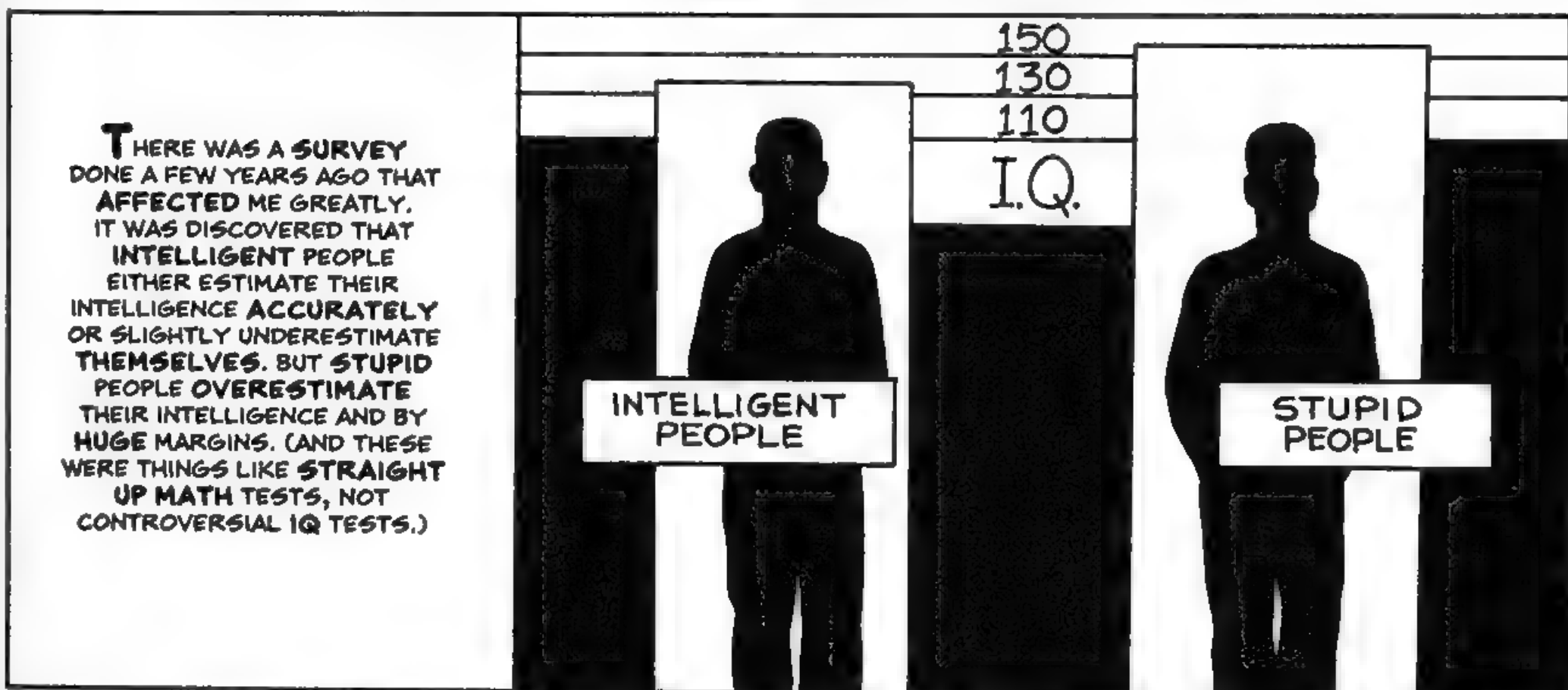
IT'S REALLY FUNNY, WHEN I FIRST MET YOU I THOUGHT YOU WERE THIS REALLY SWEET QUIET KID.

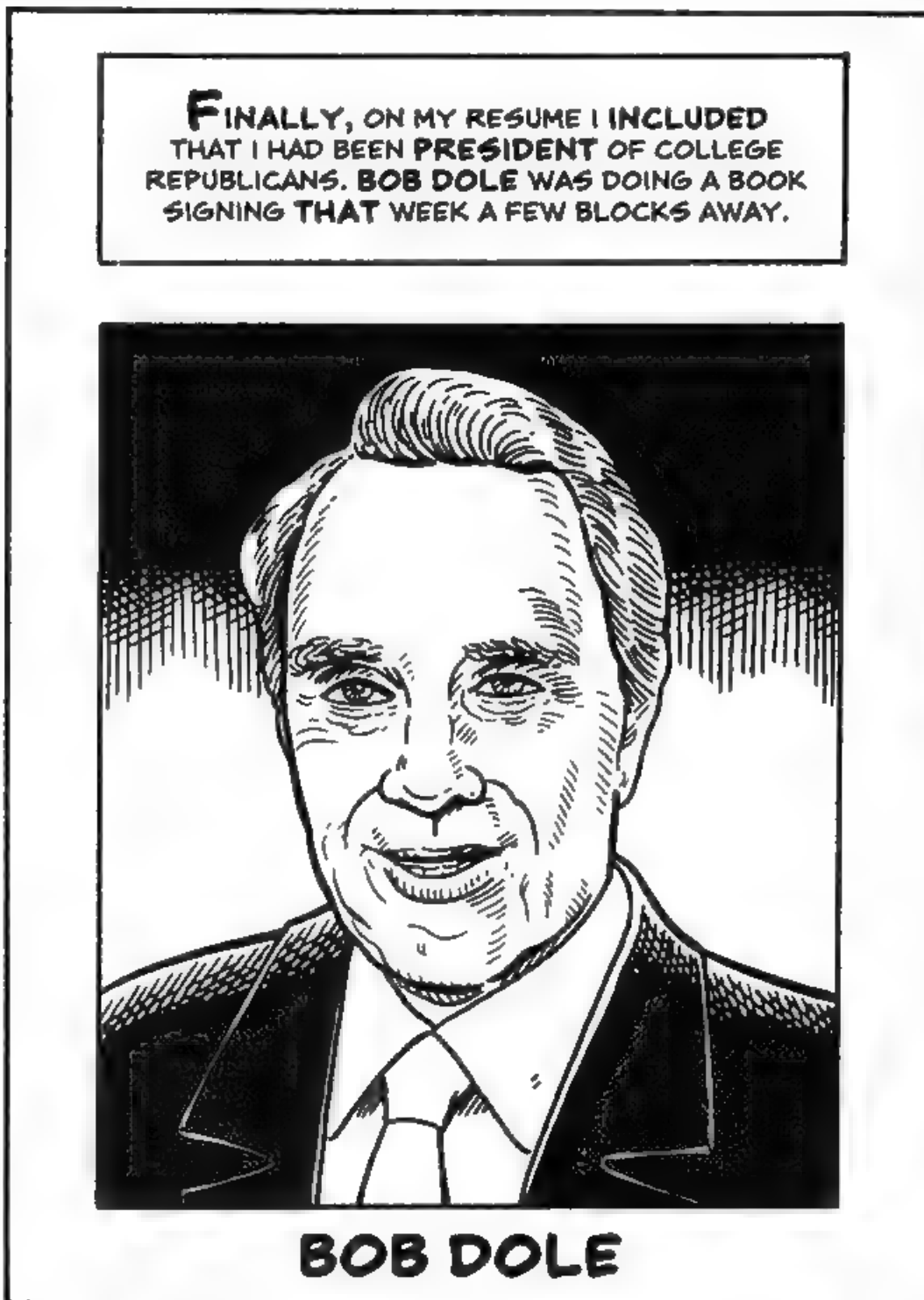


I FLY UNDER PEOPLE'S RADAR ALL THE TIME. I LOOK MUCH YOUNGER THAN MY AGE. I STILL PASS FOR 16 AT AGE 29 - AS WELL AS SEEMING INNOCENT TO BOOT. THIS IS A HUGE ADVANTAGE TO ME STRATEGICALLY, AS PEOPLE ALWAYS UNDERESTIMATE ME.

AFTER THIS ASSIGNMENT ENDED, I GOT A CALL TO DO ANOTHER JOB. AGAIN AT HUMAN RESOURCES, BUT FOR AN INTERNATIONAL HOTEL CHAIN. I REALLY DIDN'T WANT TO GO BACK TO HR BUT THE TEMP AGENCY WAS DESPERATE. THE HOTEL PEOPLE MADE EVERYONE TAKE A TEST AND NO ONE WAS PASSING IT. SO I DID THEM A FAVOR AND WENT IN FOR THE TEST. I SCORED PERFECTLY AND I'M NOT SURPRISED. THERE WERE QUESTIONS ON WORLD CURRENCY AND CAPITALS, AND UNFORTUNATELY VERY FEW PEOPLE KNEW THAT BANGKOK WAS IN THAILAND OR THAT THEY USE THE RAND IN SOUTH AFRICA. THE TEMP AGENCY BEGGED ME TO TAKE THE ONGOING ASSIGNMENT.

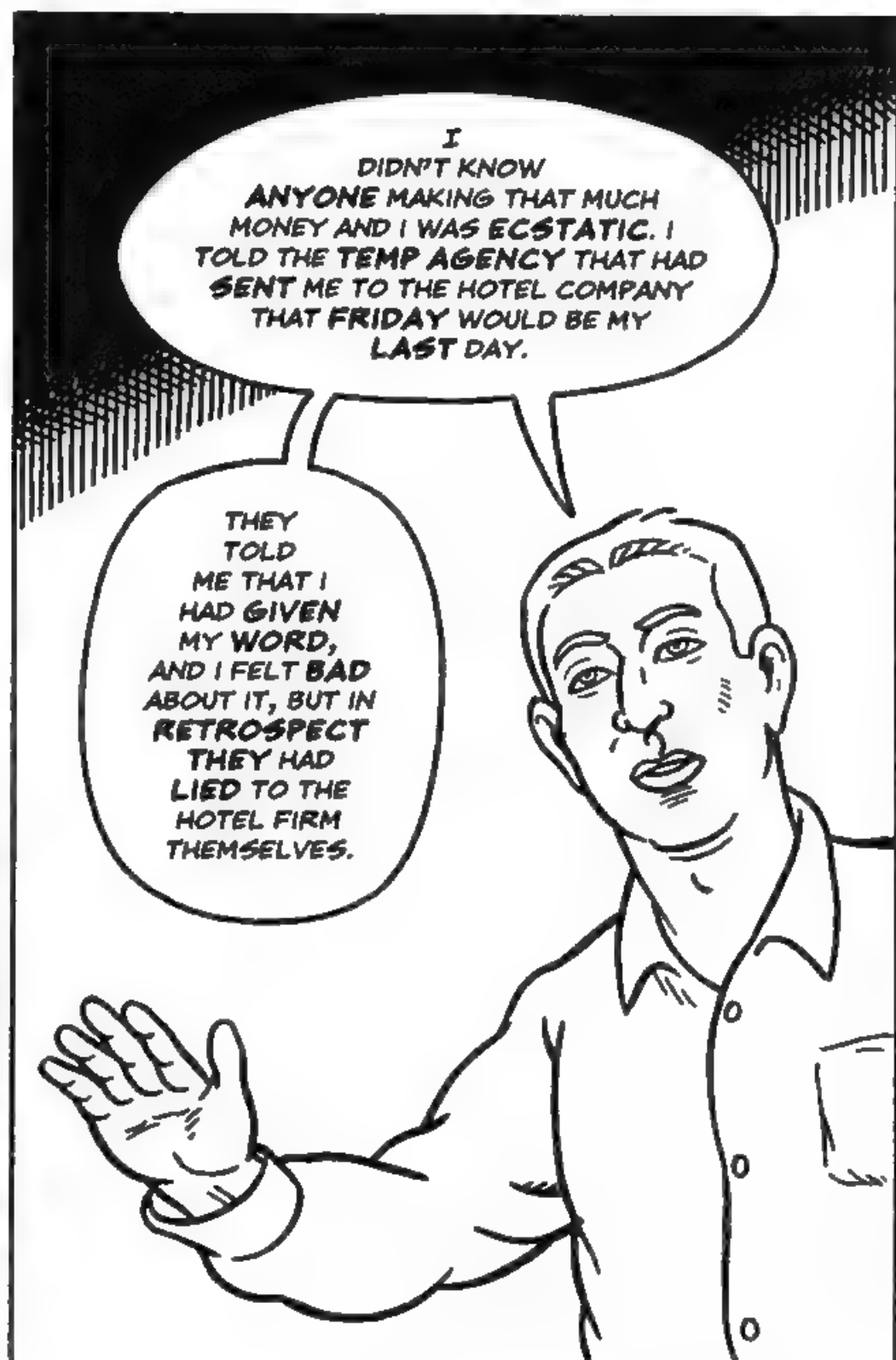








SO DURING LUNCH I CALLED A FORMER TEMP AGENCY AND TOLD THEM THEY HAD TO GET ME OUT OF THERE. THE NEXT DAY I HOPPED IN A CAB FOR A JOB INTERVIEW ACROSS TOWN. THE INTERVIEWER WAS A STUYVESANT ALUM TOO, SO I GOT THE JOB. I CABBED BACK TO THE OFFICE AND FOUND THAT IT WAS \$22.00 AN HOUR AND AFTER 3 MONTHS I WOULD BE HIRED OUTRIGHT AT THE CONSULTING COMPANY FOR \$48,000 A YEAR.



ANYWAY, THE THURSDAY I WENT TO MEET BOB DOLE WAS THE DAY MY REPLACEMENT STARTED, WHO I WAS GOING TO TRAIN. HE WAS A BLACK REPUBLICAN, HAD SERVED IN THE MILITARY AND WAS ONE OF THOSE FLAG HUGGERS THAT I HAVE NOTHING IN COMMON WITH. WE STARTED TALKING ABOUT POLITICS AND HE REGARDED ME AS SOME SORT OF NUTTY EXTREMIST.



THE BOOK SIGNING WAS FOR DOLE'S NEW BOOK ABOUT PRESIDENTIAL HUMOR. I COULDN'T IMAGINE THINKING THAT ANYTHING IN THERE WOULD ACTUALLY BE FUNNY SO I BROUGHT ALONG MY OLD COPY OF DOLE'S 1988 AUTOBIOGRAPHY. WHILE WAITING IN LINE THE WOMAN TOLD ME THAT DOLE WOULD ONLY BE SIGNING HIS NEW BOOK. I NODDED IN UNDERSTANDING AND THEN WENT RIGHT UP TO HIM AND SAID:



SURE.

AND HE ACTUALLY TOOK THE PEN OUT OF HIS CRIPPLED HAND TO SIGN IT. I ALWAYS THOUGHT THAT PEN WAS FOR SHOW.

...I WORKED ON YOUR CAMPAIGN.

I LIED. THE BUCKNELL COLLEGE REPUBLICANS NEVER DID ANY CAMPAIGNING.

WELL, YOU DID A GOOD JOB.

NOT GOOD ENOUGH.

THIS MADE HIM LAUGH. BUT EVEN THEN I DIDN'T THINK MUCH OF DOLE AND FELT HE REALLY BLEW IT WITH HIS CAMPAIGN.



THERE WAS A PARTICULARLY DISGUSTING MOMENT IN HIS DEBATES WITH CLINTON WHERE HE SAID:

PRESIDENT CLINTON WANTS THE GOVERNMENT TO GROW AT 16%; I WANT IT TO GROW AT 12%.

CLUELESS.

I STARTED MY NEW JOB THAT MONDAY. IT WAS A Y2K JOB; WE WERE CHANGING SPREADSHEETS INTO 4 DIGIT YEARS SO THAT THE Y2K BUG WOULDN'T MESS THINGS UP.

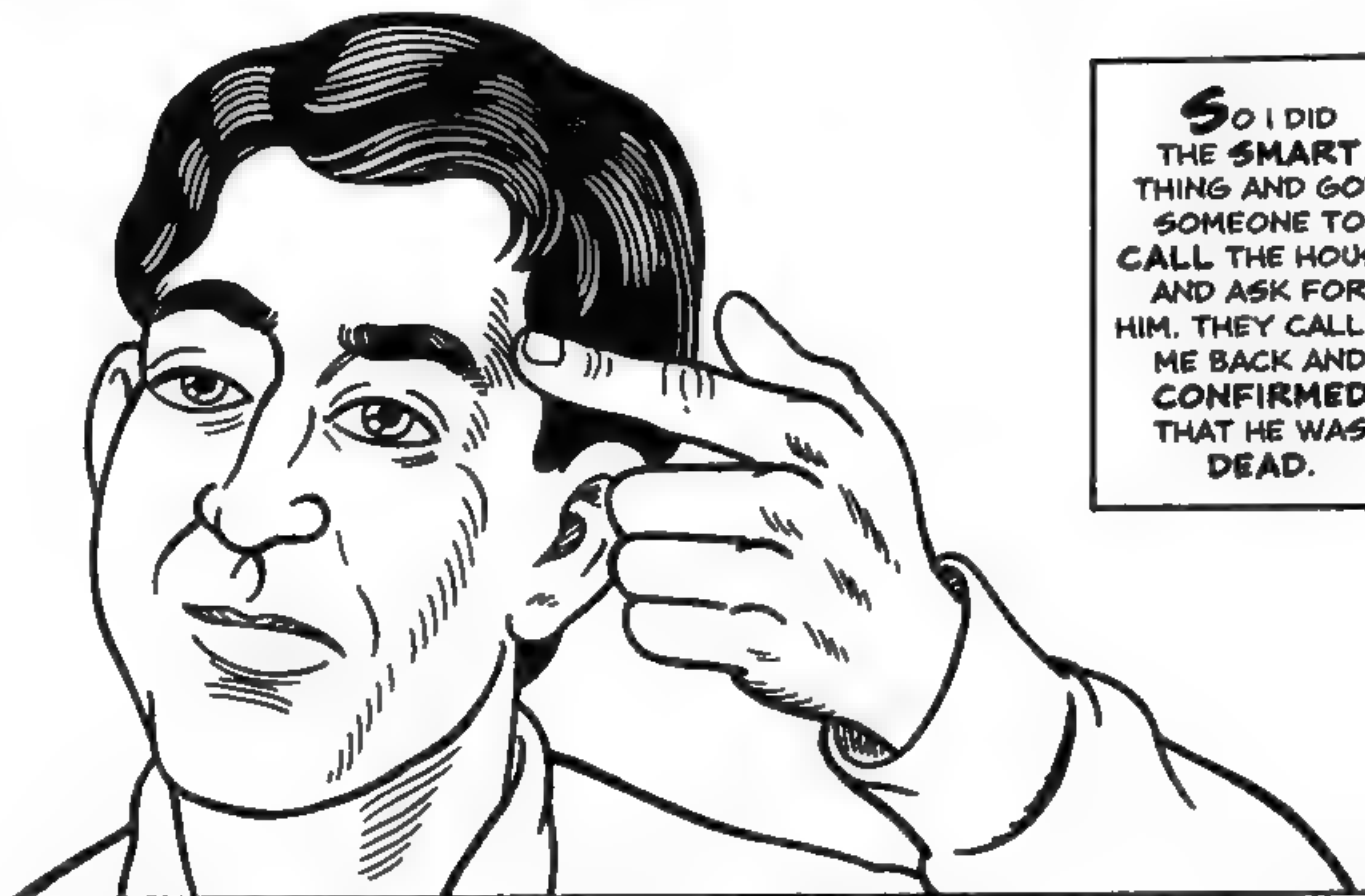
Y2K

EVEN THEN I REALIZED WHAT A KITSCHY JOB IT WAS.

I'M A HUGE NOSTALGIA BUFF, AND Y2K WAS SOMETHING THAT WAS SO QUICKLY A FORGOTTEN PRODUCT OF ITS TIME, LIKE MARY LOU RETTON OR THE PET ROCK.



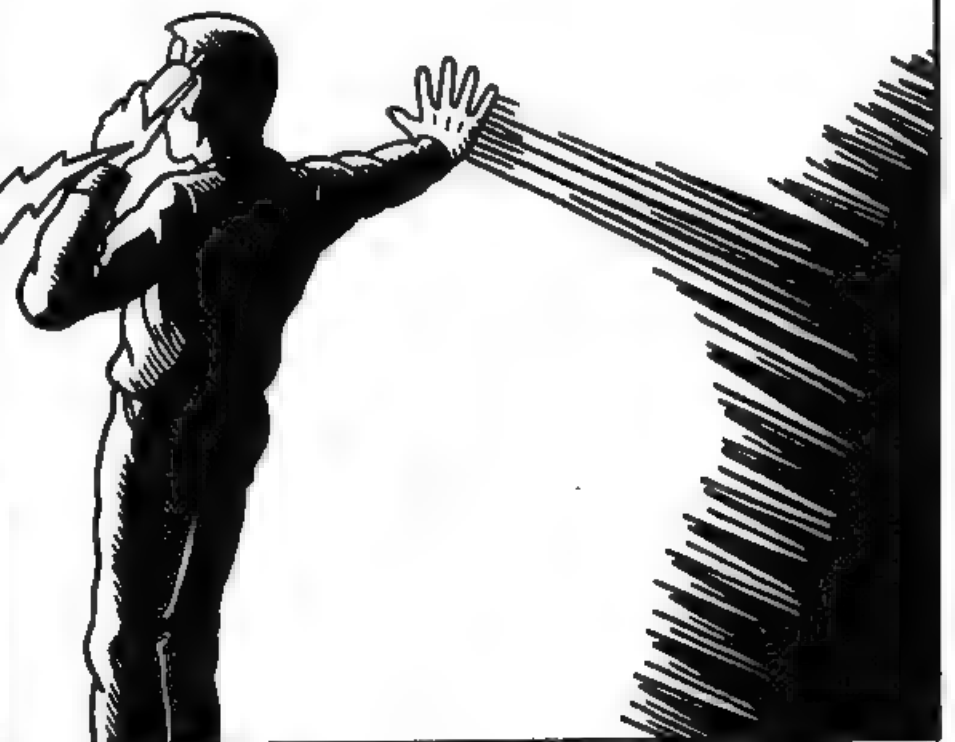
MARK WAS VERY OPEN WITH HIS PROBLEMS AND A VERY RESILIENT GUY. THERE'S SOME QUOTE LIKE "GOD LOVES A SIMPLE MIND" OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT. I "KNEW" THAT THIS WAS A CANARD GIVEN HIS PERSONALITY, THAT HE WOULD KILL HIMSELF. I DID NOT WANT TO TALK TO HIM.



SO I DID THE **SMART** THING AND GOT SOMEONE TO CALL THE HOUSE AND ASK FOR HIM. THEY CALLED ME BACK AND **CONFIRMED** THAT HE WAS DEAD.

I CALLED HARJIT AND WE IMMEDIATELY STARTED CRACKING JOSES. I'VE GOT A REALLY DARK SENSE OF HUMOR AND SO DOES HARJIT. BUT MORE THAN THAT, IT WAS SUCH AN ABSURD SITUATION THAT IT WAS HARD TO TAKE SERIOUSLY.

I HOPE YOU DON'T TURN MY FUNERAL INTO A ROAST.



I MEAN, HE WAS 21, HE WAS IN GRAD SCHOOL, HE HAD A GIRLFRIEND; WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?



I NEVER UNDERSTOOD SUICIDE. IF YOUR LIFE SUCKS SO BAD, LOCK YOUR DOOR, GET ON A PLANE TO CALIFORNIA AND START YOUR LIFE ALL OVER AGAIN. NEW NAME, NEW IDENTITY.



ANYWAY, I WENT TO VISIT WITH THE FAMILY TO GET THE DETAILS OF HIS SUICIDE. I WISH I WERE MAKING THIS UP. MARK CAME HOME FROM GRAD SCHOOL FOR YOM KIPPUR AND TRIED TO HANG HIMSELF WITH HIS BELT.



THE BELT BROKE.

HE THEN TRIED TO JUMP OFF THE TERRACE. HIS PARENTS WRESTLED HIM TO THE GROUND AND TOOK HIM TO THE HOSPITAL.



HE TOLD THE HOSPITAL PEOPLE THAT HE WAS FINE, APOLOGIZED PROFUSELY:

I DON'T KNOW WHAT CAME OVER ME.



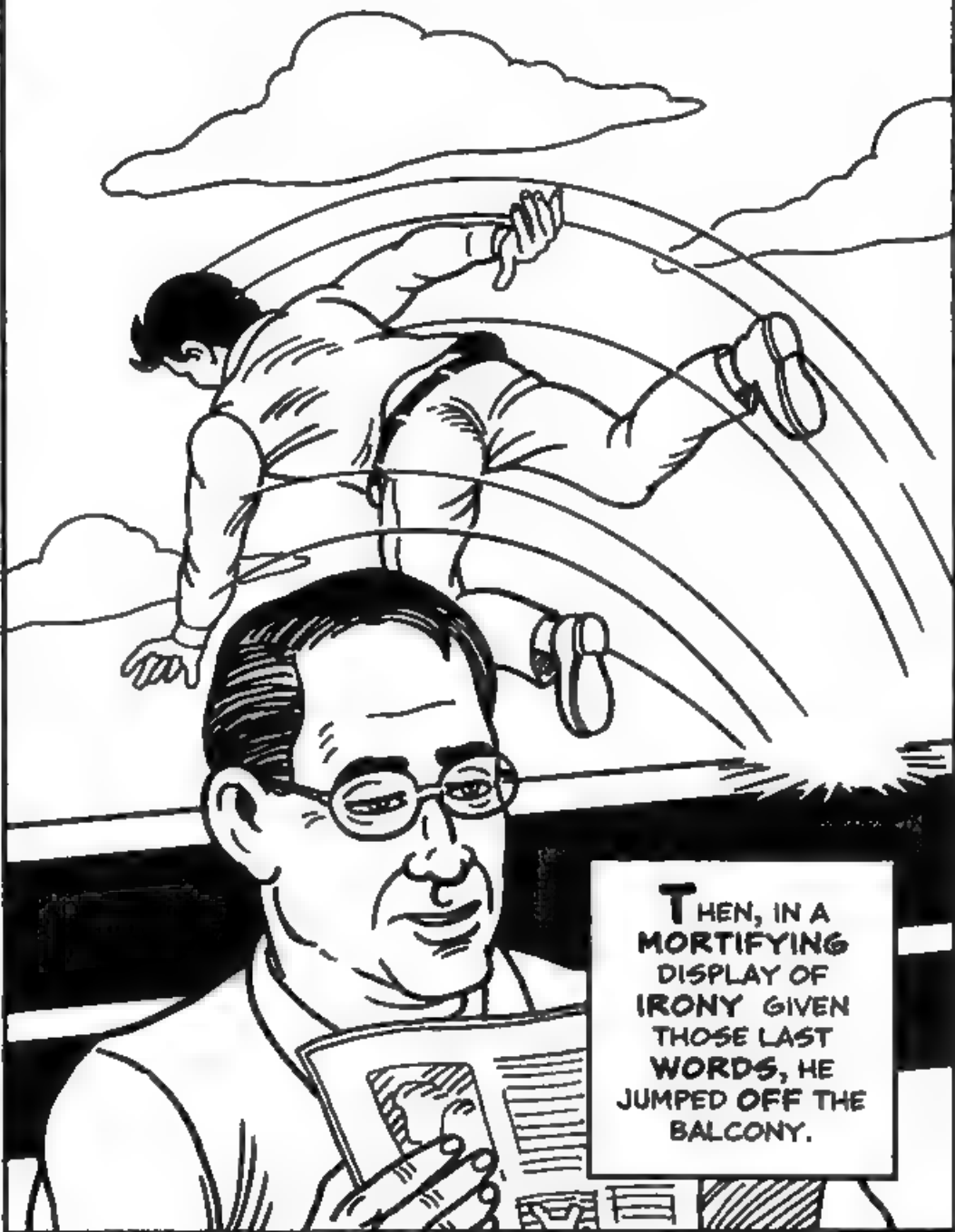
THEY HELD HIM FOR THREE DAYS, MEDICATED HIM AND RELEASED HIM.



THE DAY AFTER THAT WAS A WEDNESDAY MORNING. HE WOKE UP EARLY. HE WENT IN THE KITCHEN AND ASKED HIS MOM IF BREAKFAST WAS READY.



MARK ALWAYS USED TO PLAY BASEBALL WITH HIS DAD, SO HE TOLD HIS DAD THAT THEY SHOULD PLAY CATCH SOMETIME.



THEN, IN A MORTIFYING DISPLAY OF IRONY GIVEN THOSE LAST WORDS, HE JUMPED OFF THE BALCONY.

NOW I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY, IF YOU ARE PLANNING ON KILLING YOURSELF, YOU WOULDN'T SLEEP IN.

I ALSO DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY, IF YOU PLAN TO LEAVE A SUICIDE NOTE, YOU WOULDN'T WORK ON YOUR PENMANSHIP JUST A LITTLE BIT.

HIS PARENTS SHOWED IT TO ME AND IT WAS IN HIS GARBLED SCRAWL. THERE WAS NO EXCUSE, JUST...



I CAN'T LIVE WITH MYSELF.

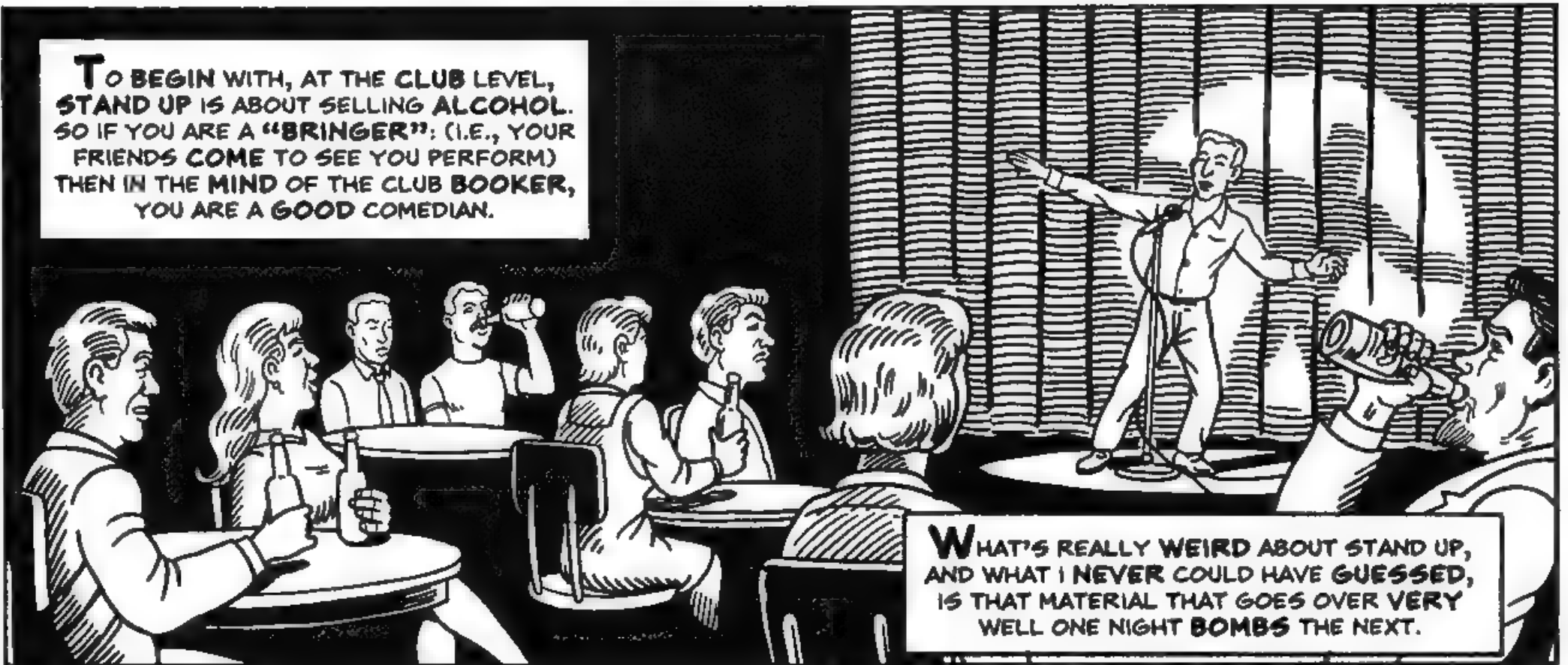
THERE WAS AN ARTICLE ABOUT HIM IN THE "DAILY NEWS". THEY INTERVIEW THE FAMILY AND THE ONLY REASON THE REPORTER COULD COME UP WITH WAS THAT MARK WAS CONFUSED ABOUT HIS FUTURE AND "INCREASINGLY BURDENED BY LIFE'S DETAILS LIKE SWITCHING HIS AUTO REGISTRATION TO MARYLAND."

DAILY @ NEWS

THIS GAVE ME GREAT INSPIRATION, SO I STARTED DOING STAND UP COMEDY. THE WAY I FIGURED IT, ANYONE CAN MAKE PEOPLE LAUGH ABOUT MEN VS. WOMEN AND LAME QUIPS ABOUT RESTAURANTS. BUT IF YOU CAN MAKE PEOPLE HOWL ABOUT SUICIDE AND BRAIN CANCER THEN YOU ARE TALENTED. IT WAS A PERFECT OUTLET FOR ME.

IT WAS ALSO GREAT BECAUSE MY DAY JOB DIDN'T REQUIRE ME TO TAKE ANY WORK HOME WITH ME, PSYCHOLOGICALLY, AND THERE WAS NO OVERTIME. THE FIRST TIME I WENT ON I GOT A HUGE OVATION, WITHOUT WHICH I MIGHT NOT HAVE CONTINUED. STAND UP IS WEIRD, VERY WEIRD.

TO BEGIN WITH, AT THE CLUB LEVEL, STAND UP IS ABOUT SELLING ALCOHOL. SO IF YOU ARE A "BRINGER": (I.E., YOUR FRIENDS COME TO SEE YOU PERFORM) THEN IN THE MIND OF THE CLUB BOOKER, YOU ARE A GOOD COMEDIAN.



WHAT'S REALLY WEIRD ABOUT STAND UP, AND WHAT I NEVER COULD HAVE GUESSED, IS THAT MATERIAL THAT GOES OVER VERY WELL ONE NIGHT BOMBS THE NEXT.

I HAVE NO EXPLANATION FOR THIS PHENOMENON, BUT IT'S A KNOWN THING IN THE COMEDY WORLD, WHICH MIGHT EXPLAIN WHY SO MANY STAND UPS ARE INSECURE. THEY NEVER KNOW WHAT THEY'RE GOING TO GET. ONE TIME I EVEN "WALKED THE ROOM". MEANING THAT AFTER MY SET EVERYONE GOT UP AND LEFT.



I DID THIS FOR A FEW MONTHS BEFORE REALIZING JUST HOW HARD IT IS FOR A STAND UP TO "BREAK OUT." THE NEXT LEVEL AFTER DOING WELL IN CLUBS IS TOURING NATIONALLY, AND I HATE TRAVELING. I'M A VERY BIG HOMEBODY.

SO I STARTED THINKING THAT I HAD MADE A WRONG TURN. BUT I WAS DELIGHTED THAT I HAD DONE IT AND DONE IT WELL, AND THAT I WAS ACTUALLY DOING SOMETHING WITH MY LIFE - UNLIKE MOST PEOPLE MY AGE.



THIS IS WHEN I THOUGHT OF THE IDEA FOR MY NOVEL. IT'S A RETELLING OF SOME OF THE BIBLE. I WANTED TO BE SURE I DID IT RIGHT, SO I BASICALLY HAD TO TEACH MYSELF THE EQUIVALENT OF A COLLEGE RELIGION MAJOR.



I STUDIED THE TALMUD, THE APOCRYPHA (THE NON-CANONICAL BOOKS OF THE BIBLE), ANCIENT MYTHOLOGY, FOLKLORE, BIBLICAL EXEGESIS. IT WAS A LOT OF WORK. IT WAS GREAT BECAUSE I APPLIED MYSELF LIKE NEVER BEFORE AND IT GOT VERY INTENSE, SOMETHING THAT NEVER HAPPENED AT SCHOOL OR WORK.



IT'S NOT THAT I WAS SIMPLY LAZY, IT'S THAT I DIDN'T CARE ABOUT SCHOOL OR WORK. BUT WHEN I WAS DOING SOMETHING FOR MYSELF I HAD A SICK LEVEL OF DEDICATION. IT WOULD TAKE ME TWO YEARS TO COMPLETE.



ANY AUTHOR WORTH HIS SALT HAS A VERY CLEAR IDEA IN HIS MIND ABOUT WHAT HIS CHARACTERS SHOULD LOOK LIKE IN THEIR MANNERS AND HOW THEY TALK. ONE OF THE EERIEST THINGS THAT HAPPENED TO ME WHILE WRITING THE BOOK WAS THAT, AT A PARTY, A GIRL WALKED IN THAT LOOKED EXACTLY LIKE MY MENTAL IMAGE OF MY HEROINE. IT WAS THE WEIRDEST THING EVER, SOMETHING STRAIGHT OUT OF "THE TWILIGHT ZONE."



I ACTUALLY ENDED UP GOING OUT WITH HER, BUT IT WAS QUITE A WHILE BEFORE I TOLD HER ABOUT THE FREAKY CIRCUMSTANCES OF ME NOTICING HER. IT SOUNDED CRAZY AND STILL DOES.

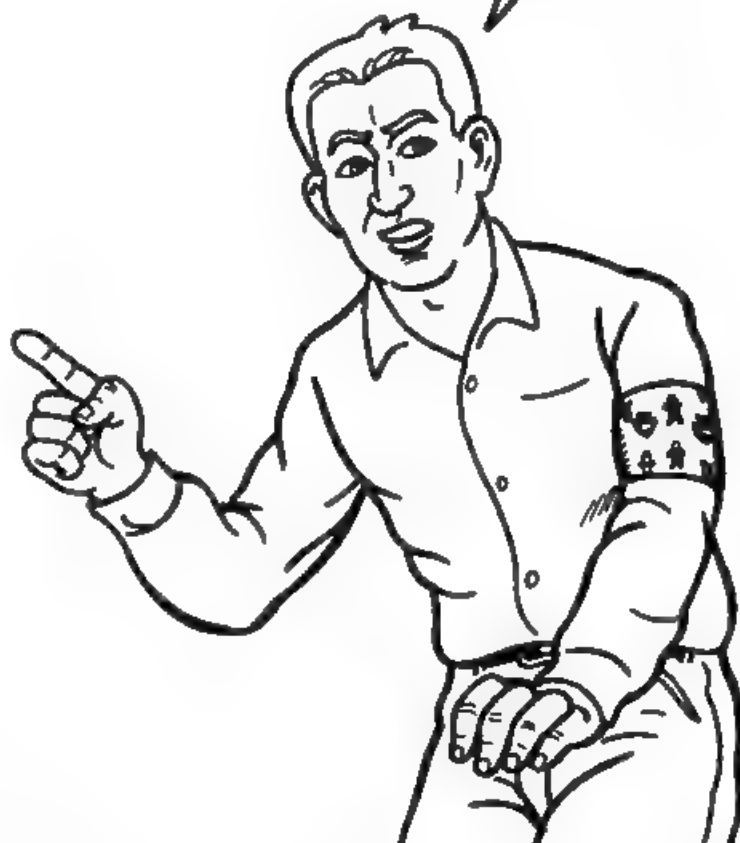
DURING THE Y2K JOB MY COWORKER, NELLY, A VERY HOT TAIWANESE GIRL, PULLED ME ASIDE.

YOUR HAIR IS SO DATED. I DIDN'T KNOW PEOPLE STILL HAD HAIRCUTS LIKE THAT. BUT YOU'RE NOT A DORK, YOU JUST DRESS LIKE A DORK. WE ARE GOING TO FIX YOU UP SO YOU STOP LOOKING LIKE ONE.



SHE TOOK ME TO A HAIRDRESSER AND THEN TO BUY CLOTHES. FROM THAT POINT ON I HAVE BOUGHT EVERY ARTICLE OF CLOTHING WITH A FEMALE IN TOW. THEY LOVE TO SHOP AND I LOVE TO LET THEM SHOP FOR ME. TO THIS DAY IF I PICK SOMETHING OFF THE RACK AS A SUGGESTION THE GIRL I'M WITH WILL INEVITABLY LAUGH AT MY STYLELESSNESS.

THE Y2K JOB ENDED IN MARCH OF 2000. AFTER WE DID THE FILE CONVERSION WE TRAINED ALL THE ACTUARIES AT THE COMPANY ON THE NEW PROGRAM THEY WOULD BE USING. THIS WAS A WONDERFUL EXPERIENCE THAT REALLY TAUGHT ME A LOT. I DIDN'T KNOW I WOULD BECOME A SOFTWARE TRAINER, BUT I KNEW I HAD A REAL APTITUDE FOR IT.



THE STAND UP COMEDY THAT I DID WAS A TREMENDOUS ASSET, BECAUSE IT TAUGHT ME TO FEEL COMFORTABLE AT THE FRONT OF AN EXPECTANT CROWD. PLUS, IT ALSO TAUGHT ME HOW TO READ A CROWD'S MOOD AND ADJUST IT, WHICH IS EASIER TO DO IN A CLASS OF EAGER STUDENTS THAN A CROWD OF SKEPTICAL DRUNKS.

THE NEXT JOB I GOT WAS WORKING FOR GOLDMAN, SACHS INC. GOLDMAN, SACHS IS A WICKED, BIZARRE PLACE. IT IS THE MOTHER OF ALL INVESTMENT BANKS AND THE CORPORATE CULTURE IS HARD TO EXPLAIN OR BELIEVE IF YOU HAVEN'T WORKED THERE. WHAT MY JOB WOULD BE WAS DOING TECHNICAL SUPPORT OVER THE PHONE.



WHAT WE WOULD DO WAS TAKE CALLS FROM PEOPLE ALL OVER THE WORLD ABOUT PROBLEMS THEY HAD WITH VARIOUS PROGRAMS LIKE WORD, EXCEL, POWERPOINT, OUTLOOK, VISIO AND A FEW OTHERS. THESE PROGRAMS ARE ALL VERY POWERFUL, WITH A GREAT DEAL OF FUNCTIONALITY. THE MORE COMPLEX A SYSTEM, OF COURSE, THE MORE THINGS CAN GO WRONG WITH IT, SO VERY OFTEN THE CALLS WOULD BE ABOUT SOME ARCAINE ASPECT OF THE PROGRAM. AND WE WOULD HAVE TO TROUBLESHOOT ON THE SPOT.

WHEN I INTERVIEWED THEY TOLD ME THAT I WOULD HAVE TO WORK OCCASIONAL WEEKENDS. WE WERE 24/7, 365 DAYS A YEAR. THIS WAS A COMPLETE BAIT AND SWITCH SINCE QUICKLY I FOUND OUT IT WASN'T AN "OCCASIONAL" WEEKEND, BUT THEY WANTED ME TO COME IN EVERY OTHER WEEKEND. I FOUGHT VERY HARD AGAINST THIS AND THIS MADE MY BOSS SUSANNE THINK I HAD A BAD ATTITUDE.



HER POSITION WAS THAT IF I DIDN'T COME IN ON A GIVEN WEEKEND, SOMEONE ELSE ON THE TEAM WOULD HAVE TO SO I WASN'T BEING FAIR. THIS FELL ON COMPLETELY DEAF EARS. SUSANNE KEPT SAYING THAT THEY WOULD BE HIRING MORE PEOPLE SO WE WOULDN'T HAVE TO COME IN ON WEEKENDS, BUT I KNOW THIS WAS A CROCK OF SHIT.

MY CO-WORKERS DIDN'T UNDERSTAND HOW IT WAS POSSIBLE FOR ME TO CHALLENGE HER ON THE SCHEDULE, WHICH CHANGED WEEKLY. THEY ALL FELT SOME WEIRD HIVE-MIND LOYALTY TO GOLDMAN AND THAT MY DARING TO IMPLY MY TIME CAME BEFORE THAT OF THE FIRM WAS AKIN TO TREASON. WE WERE ALSO NOT ALLOWED DAYS OFF PER SE, IF YOU TOOK OFF THOSE 8 HOURS WERE DISTRIBUTED ELSEWHERE IN THE SCHEDULE, SO YOU NOW HAD FOUR TEN HOUR DAYS.



IT DIDN'T HELP THE SITUATION THAT I WAS THE BEST TEAM MEMBER. I ANSWERED MORE CALLS THAN ANYONE ELSE - SINCE I WAS ABLE TO RESOLVE CALLS SO QUICKLY, MY PHONE WAS OFTEN FREE - AND GOT MORE KUDOS THAN THE REST OF THE TEAM COMBINED. KUDOS ARE WHEN A USER WRITES YOU A LETTER OF THANKS OR COMMENDS YOU TO YOUR BOSS.



THEN SUSANNE'S BOSS ARTHUR WOULD SEND OUT AN E-MAIL TO THE ENTIRE TEAM GIVING (USUALLY ME) KUDOS. IT WAS A LAME PAVLOVIAN TECHNIQUE TO GIVE THE APPEARANCE OF A REWARD FOR GOOD WORK WITHOUT BOTHERING TO ACTUALLY REWARD THE PERSON.

THEN CAME MY PERFORMANCE REVIEW. WHAT THESE BIG BUREAUCRACIES LIKE TO DO IS DIVIDE PEOPLE. THAT WAY NO ONE PERSON IS RESPONSIBLE OR ACCOUNTABLE FOR ANYTHING. MY REVIEW IS A TEXTBOOK EXAMPLE OF THE PSYCHOSIS OF THE CORPORATE WORLD AND GOLDMAN IN PARTICULAR.



SUSANNE WROTE THIS REVIEW, BUT MY CONTACT AT THE CONSULTING FIRM IS THE ONE WHO THEN WENT OVER IT WITH ME. I CALLED THE CONTACT PINOCCHIO BECAUSE SHE WAS A COMPLETE LIAR AND BECAUSE SHE HAD A BEAK ON HER LIKE AN ANTEATER.

NOT THAT PIMPLY, FLAT CHESTED, SUSANNE WAS A PRIZE EITHER. IT'S LIKE I WROTE IN MY NOVEL, "THERE'S NOTHING UGLIER THAN AN UGLY WOMAN." GOD FORBID SUSANNE TELL ME ANYTHING HERSELF.



THE FIRST THING SHE COMPLAINED ABOUT WAS A CALL I HAD GOTTEN UNMERGING CELLS IN EXCEL. UNMERGING CELLS IS AN EXTREMELY BASIC FUNCTION. SUSANNE MENTIONED THAT I HAD WRITTEN IN THE CALL LOG THAT I TOLD A VP (THIS IS APPARENTLY OF RELEVANCE IN GOLDMAN MENTALITY) THAT IT COULD NOT BE DONE. WHAT I HAD MEANT IS THAT THE VP WANTED THE DATA WITHIN SEVERAL CELLS TO BE EXTRAPOLATED INTO SEPARATE COLUMNS, WHICH IS NOT THE SAME - AND NOT POSSIBLE.

COULDN'T BE DONE!

COULDN'T BE DONE!



NOW IF SUSANNE HAD BROUGHT THIS UP TO ME WHEN SHE FIRST READ THE CALL LOG I WOULD HAVE TOLD HER WHAT I MEANT. BUT INSTEAD SHE KEEPS THIS INFO IN THE BACK OF HER HEAD FOR MONTHS - AND LETS ME GO ON, IN HER MIND, THINKING AND TELLING OTHERS AN INCORRECT THING.

THEN PINOCCHIO READ THE NEXT COMMENT:

"...HE NEEDS TO BE MORE PROACTIVE. HE WAS OBSERVED BY A MANAGER SURFING THE WEB WHILE THE LAPTOP LAB WAS BEING INUNDATED WITH CALLS, USERS DROPPING IN FOR TRAINING, USERS DROPPING OFF THEIR LAPTOP OR PICKING UP THEIR LAPTOP ETC."

"ONE THING TO REMEMBER WHEN WORKING AT GS, VERY LITTLE GOES UNNOTICED. AND LITTLE THINGS THAT ARE DONE HERE AND THERE DO GET NOTICED."

THIS WAS REPORTED TO ARTHUR. IT WOULD HAVE BEEN NICE IF HE HAD TAKEN THE INITIATIVE TO CALL ME TO ASK IF IT WOULD BE A PROBLEM TO ASSIST IN THE LAB BECAUSE THEY WERE SO BUSY.

PLEASE, SUSANNE, CAN I DO MORE WORK??

I DON'T UNDERSTAND HOW AN ADULT CAN WRITE THOSE LAST TWO SENTENCES AND NOT WANT TO KILL THEMSELVES FOR BEING SO DESPICABLE.

AFTER PINOCCHIO READ THIS SHE ASKED ME FOR MY REACTION. SHE GOT IT.

I DID NOT COME HERE TO LEARN LAPTOPS. I WAS NOT HIRED TO WORK ON LAPTOPS AND WILL NOT BE HELPING THE LAPTOP LAB AT ANY POINT IN THE FUTURE.

WELL, SUSANNE WOULD LIKE IT IF YOU STEPPED OVER TO HELP THEM.

IT'S NOT GOING TO HAPPEN. I'M NOT INTERESTED. AND ANOTHER THING: I TAKE CALLS NON-STOP ALL DAY.

IT'S VERY INTENSE AND HIGH PRESSURE. IF THERE IS SOME DOWNTIME TO TAKE A BREATH, I AM GOING TO SURF THE WEB. I DON'T LOOK AT ANYTHING INAPPROPRIATE. THERE'S NOTHING WRONG WITH TAKING A BREAK WHEN THERE IS A LULL IN THE CALL VOLUME TO HELP MY MIND RECUPERATE.

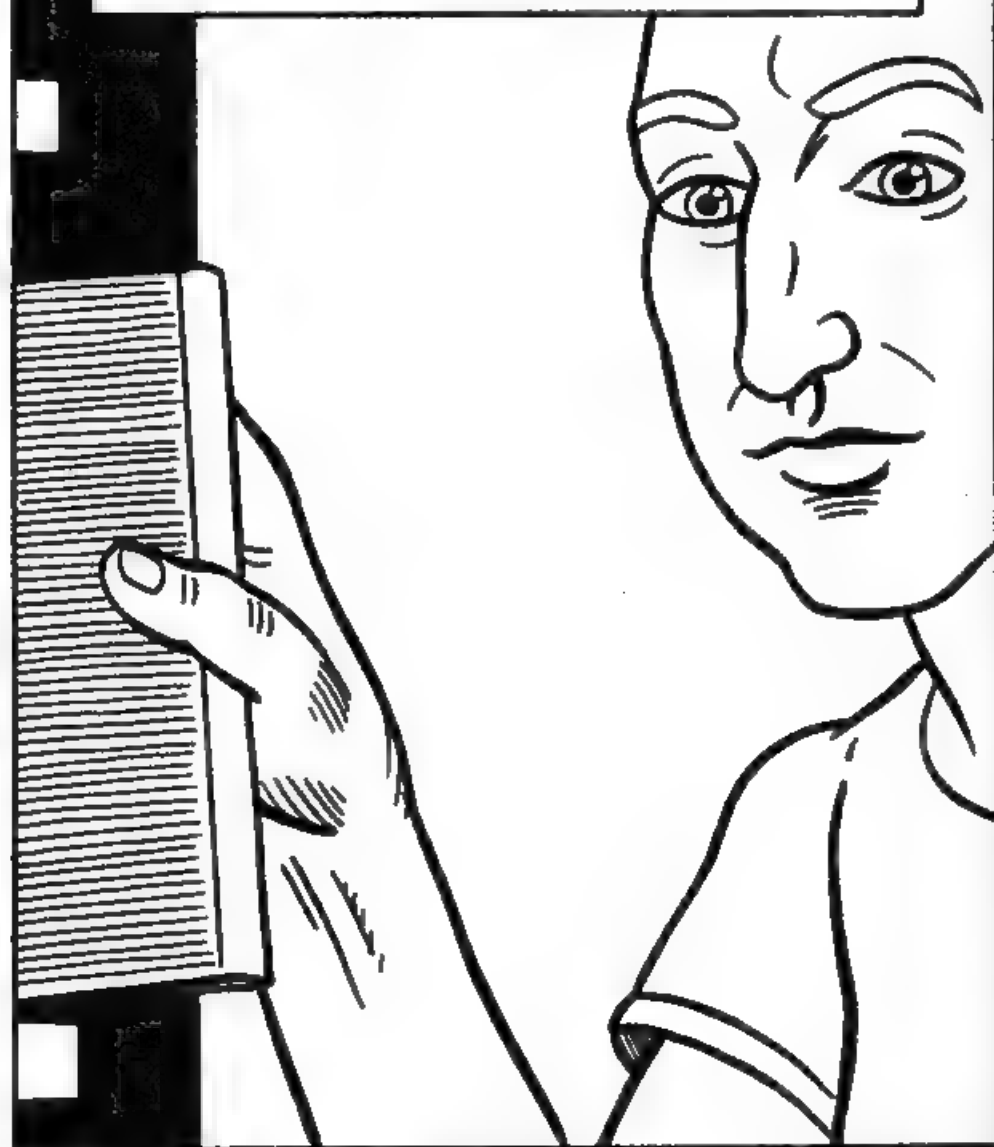
PINOCCHIO WAS SHOCKED THAT I STOOD UP FOR MYSELF IN ANY WAY, THAT I DIDN'T KOWTOW TO SUSANNE'S WHIMS.

DURING THIS TIME MY GRANDPARENTS WENT TO SAN FRANCISCO WHERE MY GREAT-GRANDMOTHER AND GRANDMOTHER'S BROTHER LIVED. MY GREAT-GRANDMOTHER HAD BEEN DIAGNOSED WITH INOPERABLE RENAL CANCER. THEY GAVE HER A MONTH TO LIVE. IN THEIR CRAZY LOGIC, MY GRANDMOTHER AND HER BROTHER DID NOT TELL MY GREAT-GRANDMOTHER THAT SHE WAS GOING TO DIE. THEY TOLD HER IT WAS THE FLU.



MY GRANDMOTHER THEN TOOK CARE OF HER A MONTH AND WATCHED HER OWN MOTHER WASTE AWAY AND DIE, WHILE BITING HER TONGUE.

MY GREAT-GRANDMOTHER LEFT ME SOME MONEY. I USED IT TO BUY A SIGNED E. NESBIT BOOK, SOMETHING THAT I WOULD ALWAYS REMEMBER SHE GAVE TO ME.



BACK AT WORK, SUSANNE STARTED TO FUCK WITH MY SCHEDULE SO THAT WHEN I WOULD INEVITABLY COMPLAIN I WOULD BE BRANDED AS A COMPLAINER, WHICH IS ONE OF THE OLDEST CORPORATE TRICKS IN THE BOOK.



MY SHIFT WAS USUALLY 8AM - 4PM. SUSANNE SENT OUT AN E-MAIL WITH THE SCHEDULE FOR THE THANKSGIVING WEEK. SHE HAD ME WORKING 8AM - 4PM MONDAY THROUGH WEDNESDAY, THEN 4PM TO MIDNIGHT THURSDAY, THEN 8AM - 4PM FRIDAY. THIS WAS OBVIOUSLY UNREASONABLE, SINCE I WAS SUPPOSED TO GO HOME THURSDAY NIGHT, GRAB SOME SLEEP AND TURN AROUND AND GO RIGHT BACK TO WORK.

I E-MAILED SUSANNE FIVE MINUTES AFTER THE SCHEDULE WENT OUT, TELLING HER THAT I WOULD BE HAPPY TO WORK THANKSGIVING MORNING BUT THAT I PROMISED MY GRANDMOTHER THAT I WOULD HAVE THANKSGIVING DINNER THAT NIGHT (WHICH WAS TRUE).

SHE REPLIED TO FIND SOMEONE TO TAKE MY SLOT, THEN, SHE CC'ED ARTHUR AND PINOCCHIO. THIS IS ANOTHER LITTLE CORPORATE AGGRESSION TECHNIQUE, ESCALATING THINGS, FOR NO REASON.



IT IS ALSO A SIGN OF SOMEONE WHO IS UNABLE TO HANDLE THEIR OWN MANAGERIAL RESPONSIBILITIES. IT WAS REALLY FUNNY BECAUSE AS TIME WENT ON SUSANNE GOT MORE AND MORE STRESSED AND THIS CAUSED HER TO GET MORE AND MORE ACNE.



IT WAS LIKE DORIAN GRAY OR SOMETHING.

I COULDN'T FIND ANYONE TO TAKE MY SLOT. I REITERATED THAT I WOULD NOT BE COMING IN, EXPECTED TO BE FIRED AND PERFECTLY COMFORTABLE WITH THAT. THE CHOICE BETWEEN SERVILITY AND INTEGRITY ISN'T REALLY A CHOICE FOR ME, AND I WAS PERFECTLY PREPARED TO TAKE THE CONSEQUENCES.



I'D HAVE TO LOOK AT MYSELF IN THE MIRROR EVERY MORNING AND MY SALARY WAS NOT ENOUGH FOR ME TO IGNORE WHAT I WOULD SEE IF I LET SUSANNE WALK ALL OVER ME. SURE ENOUGH I WAS FIRED.

SHORTLY THEREAFTER ARTHUR'S WIFE DIED OF CANCER. BOY DID I LOVE KARMA, THAT MADE MY DAY.

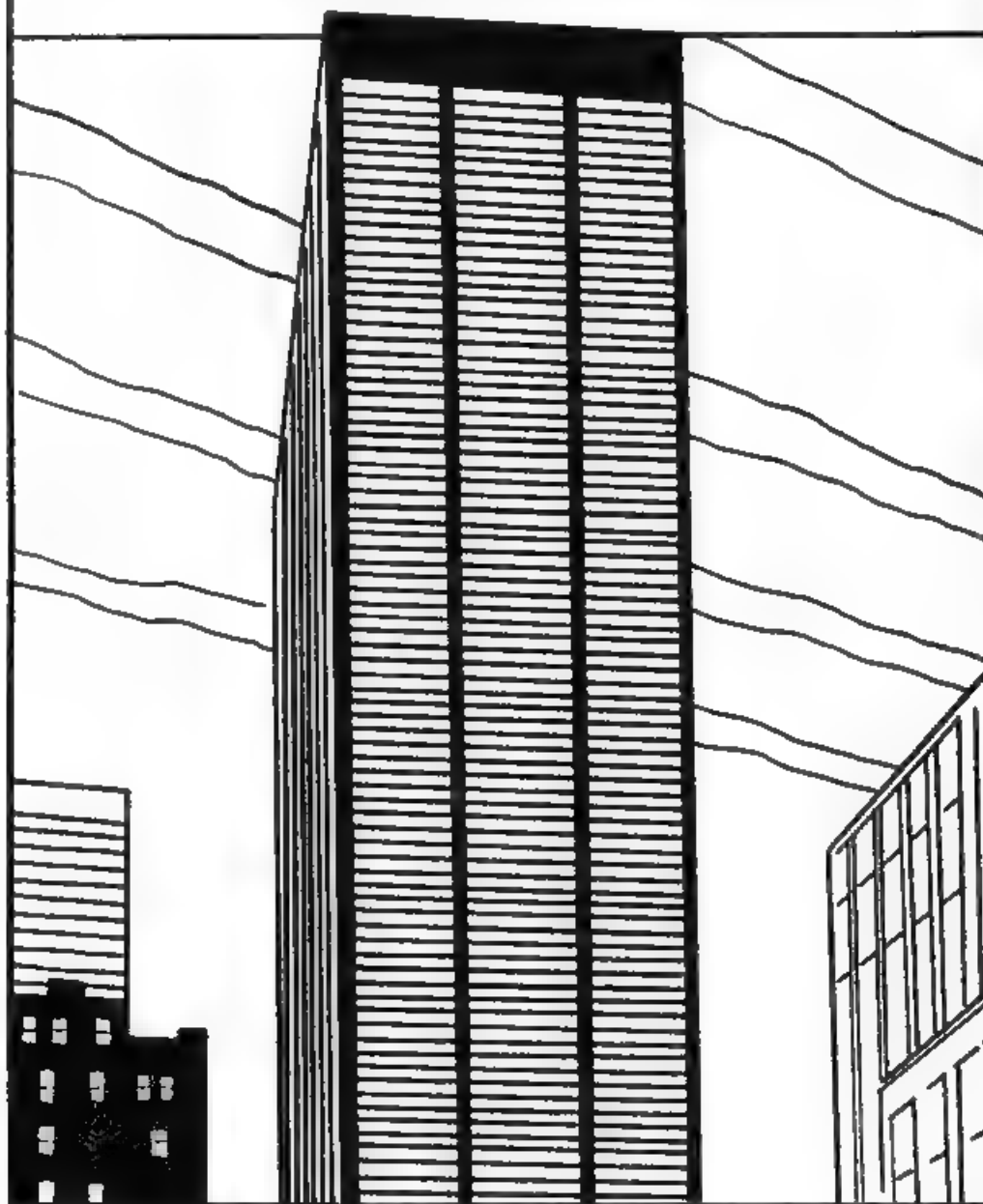


I WAITED A FEW MONTHS AND MAILED SUSANNE A TUBE OF PIMPLE CREAM.

BUT THE FUN DIDN'T STOP THERE. MY FRIEND, ANNA, WHO STARTED THE SAME DAY AS ME, TOLD ME A STORY THAT STILL HAUNTS ME. ONE OF MY CO-WORKERS WAS A WOMAN IN HER 40'S NAMED CLAUDIA. CLAUDIA AND I NEVER HAD A CONVERSATION IN OUR LIVES. WE SHARED A DESK FOR A WHILE, SO SHE CAME IN WHEN MY SHIFT ENDED.



GOLDMAN HAD OFFICES IN TWO BUILDINGS, 1 LIBERTY PLAZA AND 85 BROAD STREET. THERE WAS ALWAYS ONE PERSON AT 85 BROAD (THE REST AT 1 LIBERTY) IN CASE SOMEONE HAD A PROBLEM AT THEIR DESK. THIS PERSON ROTATED.

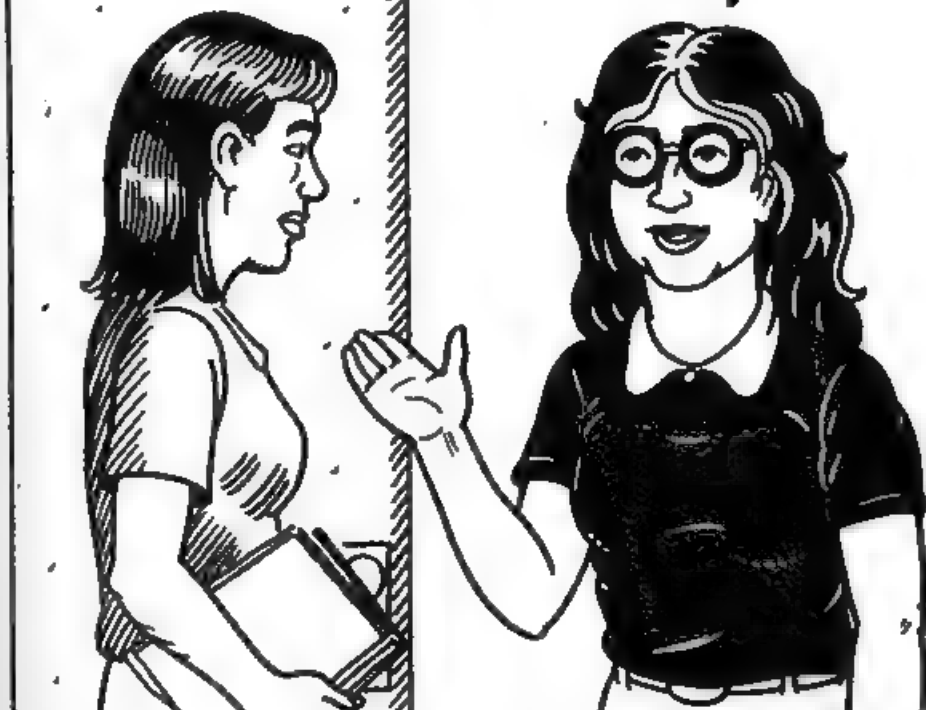


BUT ONCE I WENT THERE I REQUESTED TO STAY AND BE THE PERMANENT 85 BROAD STREET PERSON, SO THAT I WOULDN'T HAVE TO BE SURROUNDED BY THE GARBAGE THAT WAS MY TEAM. THIS REQUEST WAS GRANTED.



WHICH IS WHY THE FOLLOWING IS SO CRAZY. CLAUDIA TOLD ANNA - NOT REALIZING THAT ANNA AND I REMAINED FRIENDS - THAT SHE GAVE ME A DRESSING DOWN ONE DAY.

I TOLD MIKE,
I DON'T FIND YOU
FUNNY AND WHAT YOU
SAY DOESN'T INTEREST ME.
AND
AFTER THAT HE
LEFT ME ALONE.



I STILL THINK ABOUT THIS ALL THE TIME. NOT ONLY DID THIS NEVER HAPPEN, NOTHING EVEN REMOTELY LIKE THIS EVER HAPPENED. I NEVER TRIED TO TELL CLAUDIA ANYTHING; SHE NEVER DISSUADED ME FROM TALKING TO HER EVEN POLITELY, LET ALONE SO HARSHLY. ANNA KNEW THIS WAS THE CASE BEFORE SHE EVEN ASKED ME, BECAUSE IF THIS OR ANYTHING REMOTELY LIKE THIS HAD HAPPENED I WOULD HAVE TOLD ANNA IMMEDIATELY.



A COUPLE OF WEEKS LATER I HAD LUNCH WITH ANNA AND WE WERE IN THE LOBBY GETTING A SNACK. CLAUDIA WALKED UP TO US, AND WITH A BIG SMILE SAID:

MIKE! HOW ARE YOU?

I CAN HONESTLY
SAY THAT IT'S GOOD TO
SEE YOU. WHAT ARE YOU UP
TO?



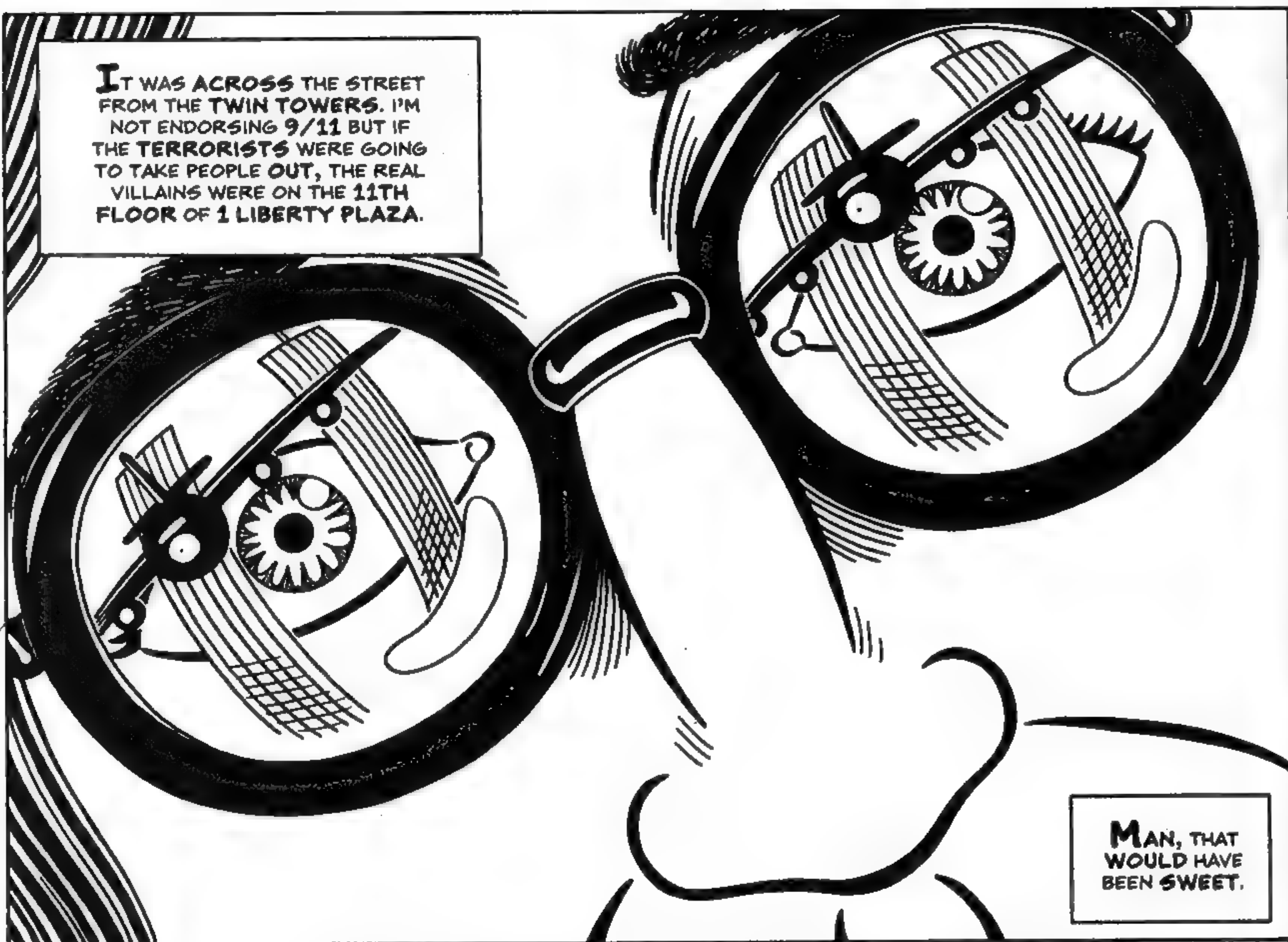
I STOOD AND LOOKED AT HER FOR A GOOD TEN SECONDS. I WANTED TO ASK HER IF SHE BELIEVED THAT WE HAD THAT EXCHANGE OR IF SHE WAS LYING. I DIDN'T CARE WHICH; I WAS AND AM SINCERELY FASCINATED BY THE PSYCHOLOGY. I COLDLY TOLD HER:

I'M FINE.



I DIDN'T WANT ANNA TO GET INTO TROUBLE. THANKFULLY SHE QUIT THAT HORRIBLE PLACE.

IT WAS ACROSS THE STREET FROM THE TWIN TOWERS. I'M NOT ENDORSING 9/11 BUT IF THE TERRORISTS WERE GOING TO TAKE PEOPLE OUT, THE REAL VILLAINS WERE ON THE 11TH FLOOR OF 1 LIBERTY PLAZA.



MAN, THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN SWEET.

I GOT A JOB QUICKLY THEREAFTER AS A TECHNICAL WRITER AT AMERICAN EXPRESS FOR THE SAME RATE, A SIX MONTH CONTRACT. DURING THIS TIME I KEPT SENDING OUT QUERY LETTERS TO AGENTS IN THE HOPES OF GETTING REPRESENTATION FOR MY NOVEL. NO ONE EVEN WANTED TO LOOK AT THE BOOK. THIS WAS EXTREMELY FRUSTRATING TO ME. I HAD NO PROBLEM WITH PEOPLE NOT LIKING THE WRITING OR FINDING IT UNMARKETABLE OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT, BUT I WASN'T EVEN GETTING A HEARING.

NOT THAT ANYONE OWED ME ONE, OBVIOUSLY, BUT IT WAS DIFFICULT ALL THE SAME. AS I WAS WRAPPING UP EDITING THE NOVEL (THE ALL-IMPORTANT FIRST 50 PAGES WERE POLISHED AND READY TO SHOW), I STARTED THINKING OF THE FUTURE. THE PROBLEM WAS THAT I WROTE MY NOVEL AS THE BEGINNING OF A LONG SERIES, AND IT MADE NO SENSE TO START ON VOL. 2 IF I COULDN'T PLACE VOL. 1.



I REMEMBER
THE EXACT CORNER I
WAS STANDING ON WHEN IT
CAME TO ME.

THE FACT THAT IT
IS 2 BLOCKS FROM TRISH'S
HOUSE MAKES IT EVEN A MORE
SPECIAL MOMENT.



DOING MY
RADIO SHOW
AT BUCKNELL
I CAME ACROSS
A PHOTOGRAPH
OF A BAND
CALLED
RUBBER
RODEO. THE
PICTURE WAS
THE MOST
STRIKING
PICTURE I HAVE
EVER SEEN, AND
IT REMAINS
SO.



EVERY ONE OF THE
FIVE GUYS IN THE BAND
WAS DRESSED UP IN
RIDICULOUS COUNTRY
OUTFITS WHILE TRISH,
THE SINGER, WAS IN A
HUGE DOLLY PARTON
WIG AND ZIGZAGGED
PETTICOATS. THE GUYS
WERE ALL COMPLETELY
DEADPAN, BUT THE
LOOK ON TRISH'S FACE
I FOUND EXTREMELY
COMPELLING. SHE HAD
HER HAND ON HER HIP
AND HER SMILE WAS
THE CRYPTIC SMILE OF
MONA LISA.

YOU CAN'T TELL IF THE BAND IS PUTTING YOU ON OR
IF THEY THINK THEY LOOK COOL AND ARE DELUDED.
WHO'S KIDDING WHO? THE VIEWER OR THE SUBJECT
OF THE PHOTOGRAPH? THE TEXT MENTIONED THAT
THE BAND CAME FROM AN ART SCHOOL, THE RHODE
ISLAND SCHOOL OF DESIGN (RISD).

THE WHOLE PLOT CAME TO ME IN A FLASH. IT WOULD BE ENTITLED "DISILLUSION", WHICH I CONSIDER THE MOST EVIL WORD IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE. IT WOULD BE BASED ON RUBBER RODEO, AND HAVE A TRISH CHARACTER BEING UNAPPRECIATED BY HER BANDMATES AND TALKED DOWN TO BY HER MOM.



AT THE END SHE WOULD BE OFFERED A SOLO CONTRACT, WHICH WOULD CUT THE BAND OUT OF THE LOOP, AND SOMEHOW DENY HER MOM HEALTH INSURANCE. AND SHE WOULD BE PROUD TO DO IT, BECAUSE THEY ALWAYS EXPECTED HER TO BE THERE FOR THEM AND TO TAKE THEIR SHIT. THE LAST LINE WAS GOING TO BE:

IT'S FUNNY, ISN'T IT? IT TURNS OUT I'M LEAVING THIS BAND THE SAME WAY I ENTERED IT. ALONE.

THAT IS, THEY WERE NEVER A UNIT AT ALL AND SHE COMES TO REALIZE THIS.

I E-MAILED A GUY WHO HAD PUT TOGETHER A WEBSITE ABOUT THE BAND AND HE PUT ME IN TOUCH WITH BOB AND TRISH. THEY WERE A COUPLE DURING THAT TIME, THE VOCALISTS, AND WROTE ALL THE SONGS. THEY HAD AN EXTREMELY CLOSE RELATIONSHIP - ON THE WEBSITE TRISH MENTIONED THAT THEY WERE TOGETHER 24/7 AND WOULD EVEN FINISH EACH OTHER'S SENTENCES. THE VIDEOS THEY HAD ALSO SPOKE TO THEIR CLOSENESS.



I WAS SO NERVOUS BEFORE I CALLED TRISH THAT I GOT A HUGE STOMACHACHE. HERE WAS THIS WOMAN WHO WAS INSPIRING THIS NOVEL. I DIDN'T WANT TO UPSET HER OR ANYTHING LIKE THAT. THE MORE I TALKED TO HER ON THE PHONE, THE MORE I LEARNED JUST HOW CRAZY THINGS IN THE BAND WERE, IN A GOOD WAY.



THE DRUMMER WOULD SING A SONG ABOUT A FRENCH GIRL NAMED JOSELINA, AND AS A PREREQUISITE HE HAD TO HAVE A BAGUETTE AND GLASS OF WINE SET UP FOR HIM.

I CAME TO HER HOUSE FOR A PROPER SIT-DOWN INTERVIEW. IT WAS SO WEIRD. SHE WAS WAITING FOR ME OUTSIDE THE ELEVATOR ON HER FLOOR, AND I DID A COMPLETE DOUBLE TAKE WHEN I SAW HER. IT TOOK ME A SECOND TO RECONCILE HER IN NORMAL CLOTHES AND LOOKING 15 YEARS OLDER THAN THE WOMAN IN THE VIDEOS.



WE SAT AND TALKED FOR 4 HOURS. I WAS VERY TOUCHED BY WHAT SHE SAID. SHE MENTIONED THAT SHE HAD NEVER BEEN INTERVIEWED ABOUT THE BAND BY HERSELF, ALWAYS WITH BOB. SHE OBVIOUSLY HAD GONE OVER THESE THINGS IN HER HEAD FOR YEARS, AND WHEN SHE SPOKE IT WAS LIKE SHE WAS GIVING A MONOLOGUE.



IF I INTERJECTED FOR CLARITY SHE KEPT TALKING AS IF I WASN'T THERE. SHE SHOWED ME THEIR CRAZY OLD CONCERT FOOTAGE AND LAUGHED ABOUT BEING A KID TRYING TO BE AN "ARTIST". SHE TALKED ABOUT HER RELATIONSHIP WITH BOB, WHO IS NOW MARRIED, WITH WHOM SHE HAD A SON.

THIS IS THE FIRST TIME I'M TALKING ABOUT THIS BY MYSELF...

SHE SAT THERE FOR A SECOND AND KIND OF SHOOK HER HEAD, AND I COULD SEE YEARS OF LOVE AND FIGHTS AND SEX AND MUSIC AND TEARS REPLAYING IN HER MIND.



THEN I INTERVIEWED BOB. BOB IS IN MANY WAYS THE TEXTBOOK WASP, NEVER SHOWING EMOTION, AND KIND OF SWEEPING PROBLEMS UNDER THE RUG. I DIDN'T REALIZE HOW MUCH THE BAND WAS HIS VISION AND HIS ALONE, AND IT WAS JARRING THAT THIS GOOFY, NEW WAVE COWBOY HAD ACTUALLY BEEN A HARD-NOSED MARKETER OF THE BAND AND WAS NOW THE CEO OF A WEB DESIGN COMPANY.



TRISH FELT THAT A LOT OF HER VIEWS WERE DISMISSED, BECAUSE SHE WAS A WOMAN.

HE LOOKED AT ME IN DISBELIEF, THE QUESTION BEING SO ABSURD TO HIS THINKING THAT HE MUST HAVE THOUGHT I WAS LYING FOR A MINUTE.



HE STOPPED TO THINK AND LOOKED AT THE MANHATTAN BRIDGE AND SHRUGGED.

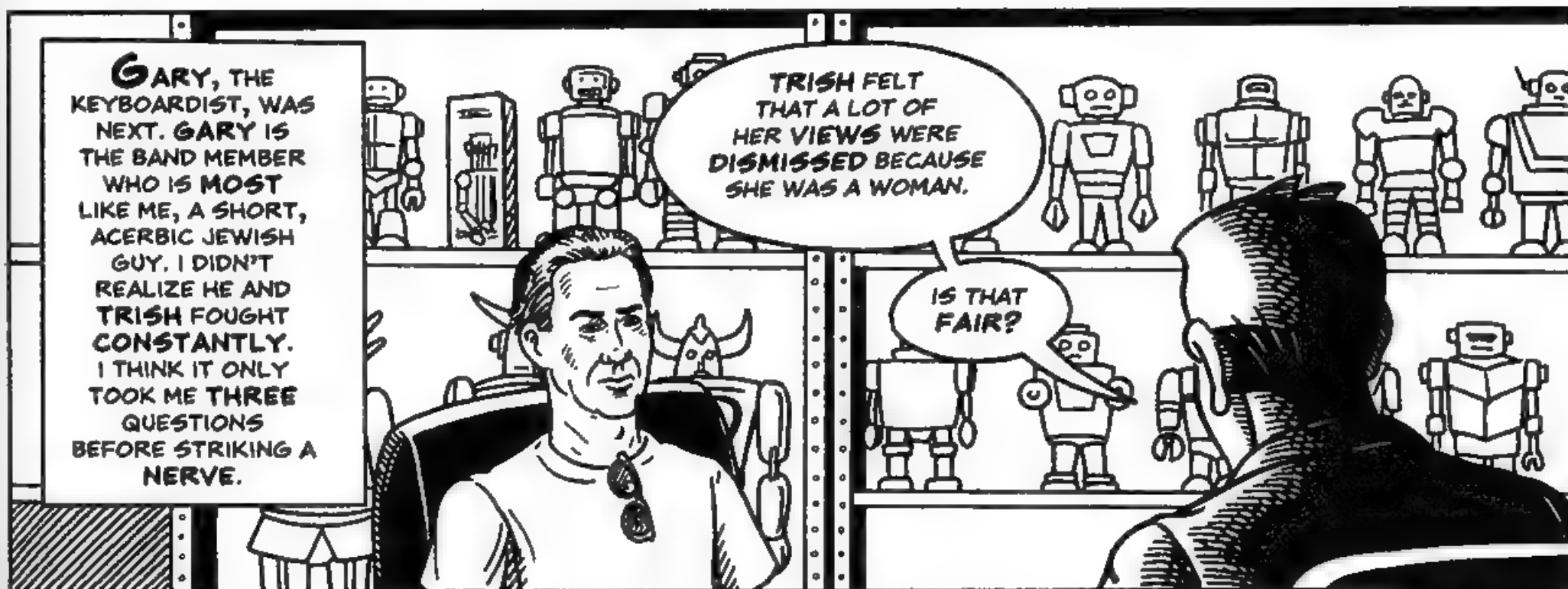


I'VE BEEN WITH THAT WOMAN FOR TWENTY YEARS AND I STILL DON'T KNOW WHAT'S GOING THROUGH HER HEAD.

BOB REITERATED THAT THE FILM SHOULD BE ABOUT THE BAND AS A FAMILY.

I'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT HOW YOU CAN MARKET THIS AND I THINK WHAT MAKES US UNUSUAL IS THAT WE'RE STILL FRIENDS AFTER ALL THESE YEARS.

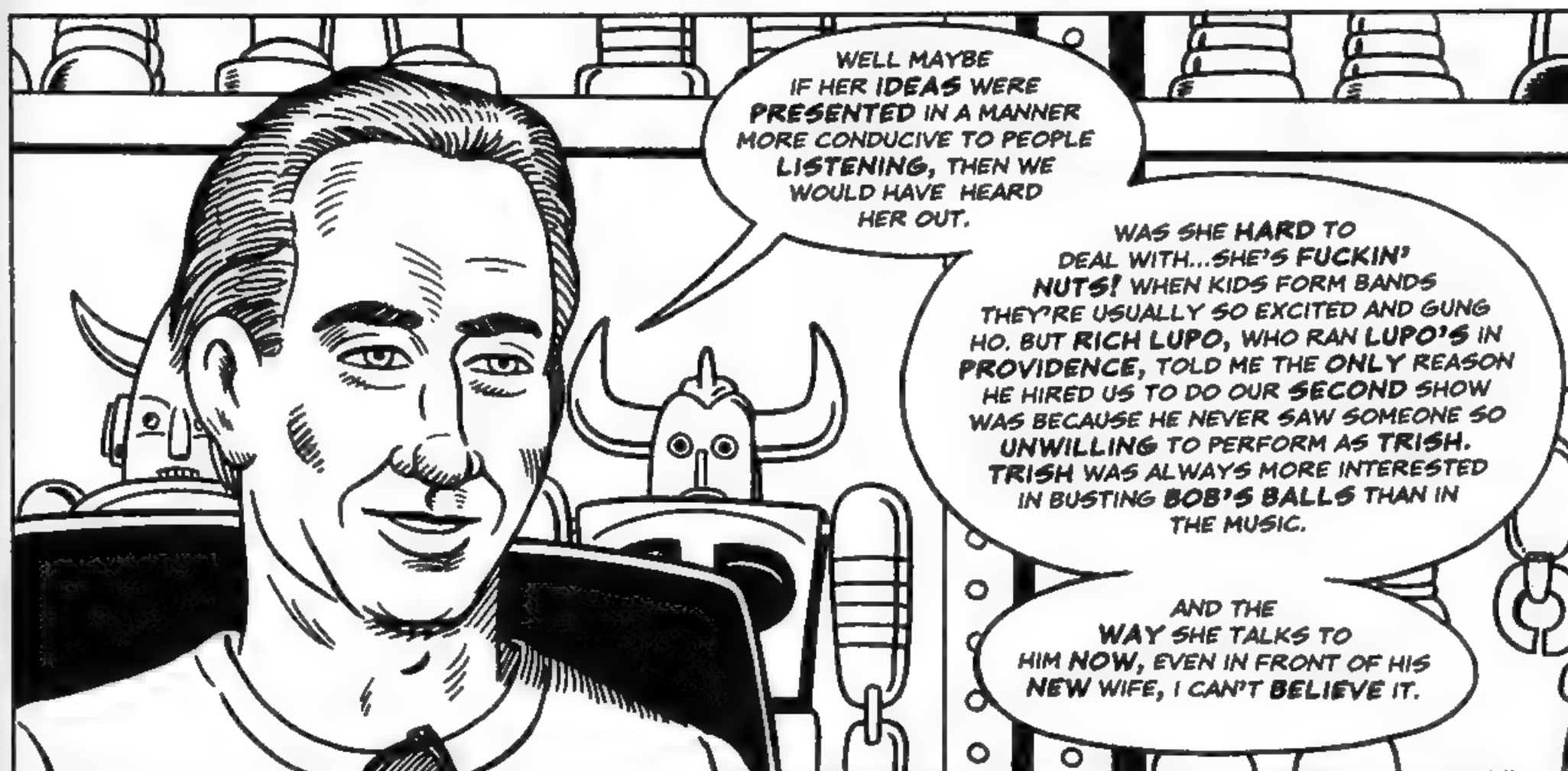




GARY, THE KEYBOARDIST, WAS NEXT. GARY IS THE BAND MEMBER WHO IS MOST LIKE ME, A SHORT, ACERBIC JEWISH GUY. I DIDN'T REALIZE HE AND TRISH FOUGHT CONSTANTLY. I THINK IT ONLY TOOK ME THREE QUESTIONS BEFORE STRIKING A NERVE.

TRISH FELT THAT A LOT OF HER VIEWS WERE DISMISSED BECAUSE SHE WAS A WOMAN.

IS THAT FAIR?



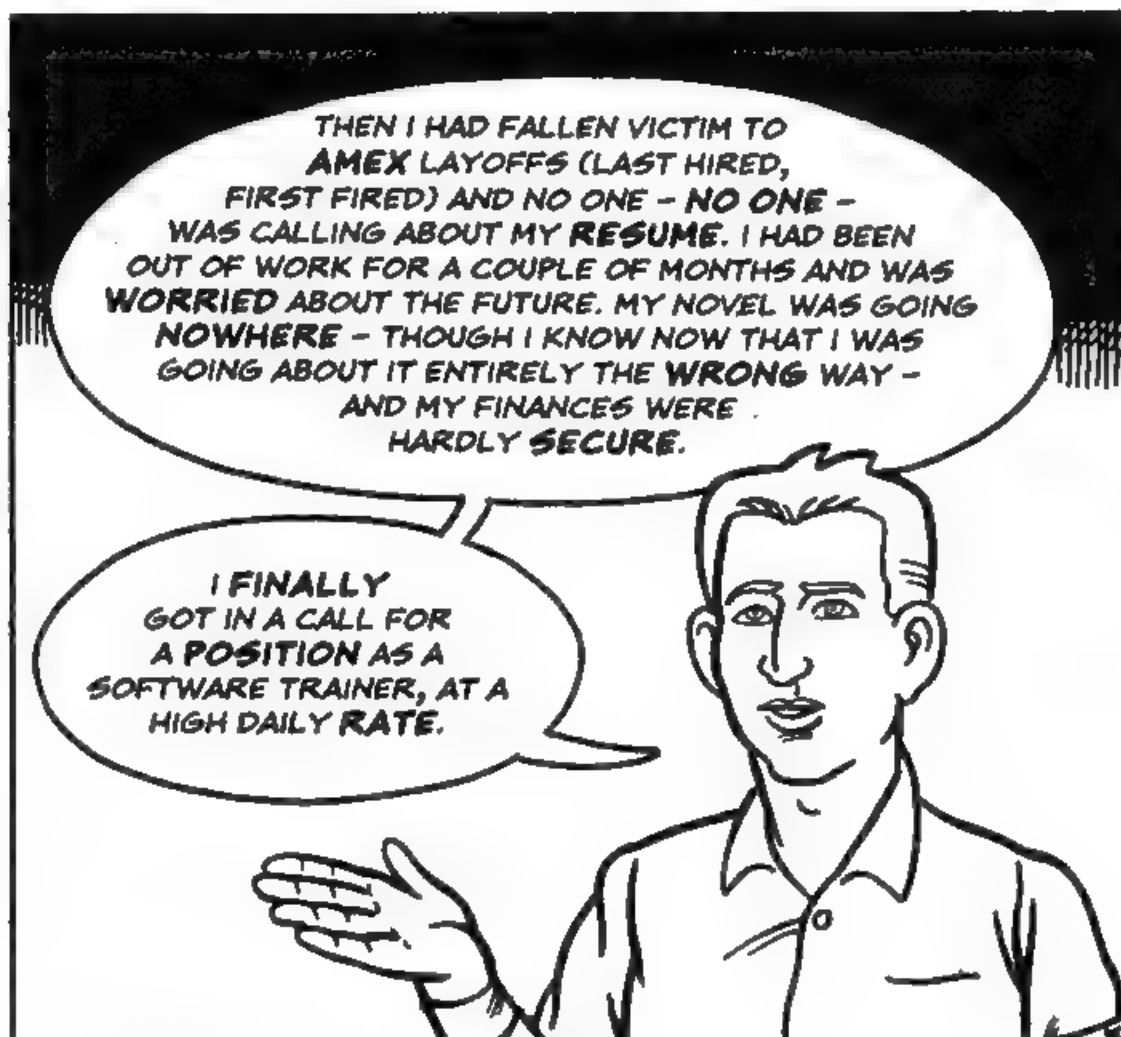
WELL MAYBE IF HER IDEAS WERE PRESENTED IN A MANNER MORE CONDUCTIVE TO PEOPLE LISTENING, THEN WE WOULD HAVE HEARD HER OUT.

WAS SHE HARD TO DEAL WITH...SHE'S FUCKIN' NUTS! WHEN KIDS FORM BANDS THEY'RE USUALLY SO EXCITED AND GUNG HO. BUT RICH LUPO, WHO RAN LUPO'S IN PROVIDENCE, TOLD ME THE ONLY REASON HE HIRED US TO DO OUR SECOND SHOW WAS BECAUSE HE NEVER SAW SOMEONE SO UNWILLING TO PERFORM AS TRISH. TRISH WAS ALWAYS MORE INTERESTED IN BUSTING BOB'S BALLS THAN IN THE MUSIC.

AND THE WAY SHE TALKS TO HIM NOW, EVEN IN FRONT OF HIS NEW WIFE, I CAN'T BELIEVE IT.



I REMEMBER AFTER THE SHOWS, ALL THESE GORGEOUS WOMEN WOULD COME UP TO BOB. AND THEY WERE GOOD TO GO, YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN? GOOD TO GO. AND HE WOULDN'T EVEN LOOK AT THEM.



THEN I HAD FALLEN VICTIM TO AMEX LAYOFFS (LAST HIRED, FIRST FIRED) AND NO ONE - NO ONE - WAS CALLING ABOUT MY RESUME. I HAD BEEN OUT OF WORK FOR A COUPLE OF MONTHS AND WAS WORRIED ABOUT THE FUTURE. MY NOVEL WAS GOING NOWHERE - THOUGH I KNOW NOW THAT I WAS GOING ABOUT IT ENTIRELY THE WRONG WAY - AND MY FINANCES WERE HARDLY SECURE.

I FINALLY GOT IN A CALL FOR A POSITION AS A SOFTWARE TRAINER, AT A HIGH DAILY RATE.

THE CATCH WAS THAT THERE WOULD BE A GROUP OF TRAINERS TRAINED FOR TWO WEEKS, AFTER WHICH ONLY A CERTAIN NUMBER WOULD GET HIRED.

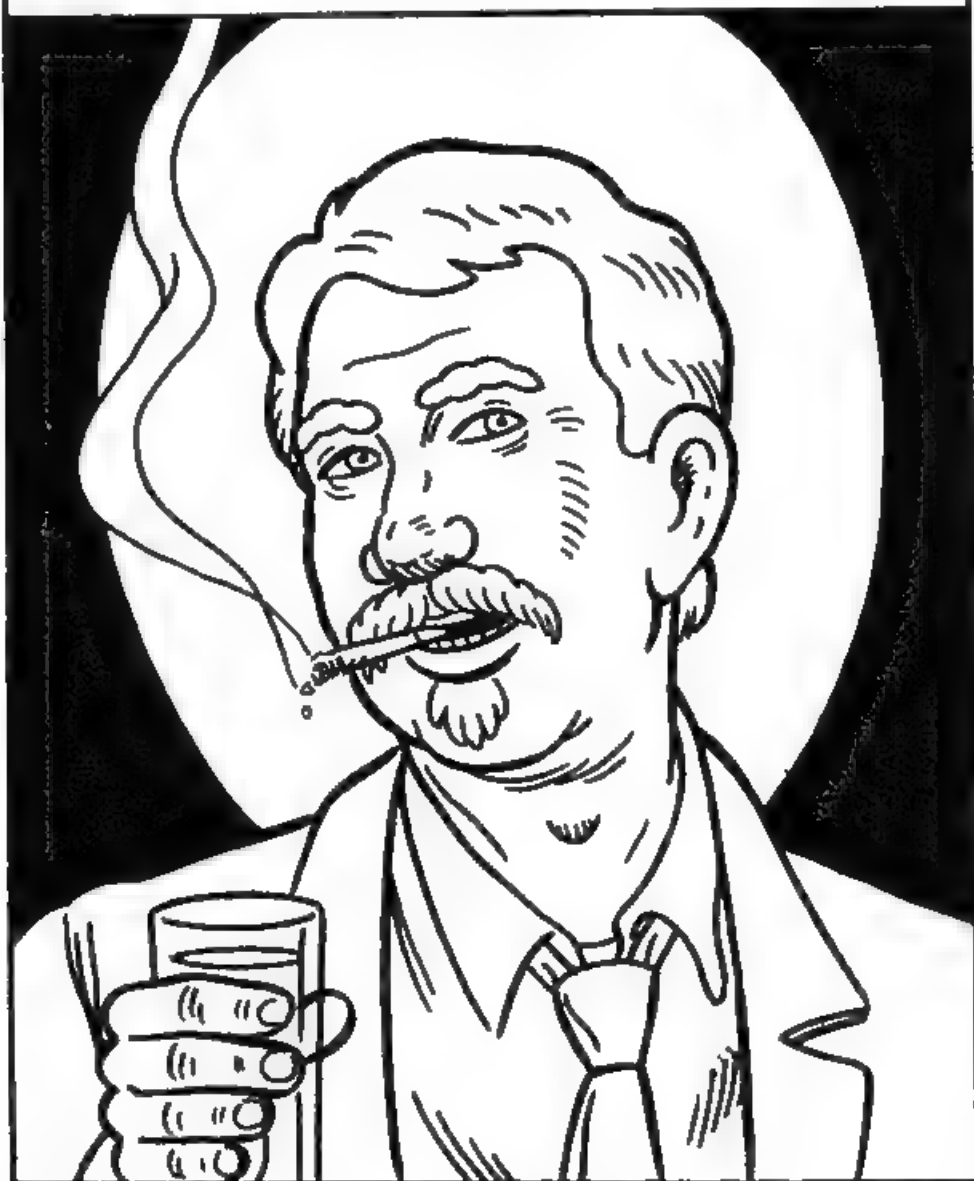
YOURS TRULY FARES VERY WELL IN COMPETITION, SO I WASN'T VERY CONCERNED.

I WOULD DO WHATEVER IT TOOK TO GET THE JOB. WE GOT DIVIDED INTO THREE GROUPS, EACH UNDER THE AEGIS OF A LEAD TRAINER. OURS WAS PAT, WHO LOOKED LIKE COLONEL SANDERS.



HE ALSO SEEMED TO BE IN HIS 50'S RATHER THAN HIS ACTUAL LATE 30'S, DUE TO HIS CONSTANT SMOKING AND DRINKING. PAT WAS GOING TO BE LEAVING AFTER THE FIRST WEEK FOR A VACATION.

IT WAS CLAIMED THAT PAT WOULD MAKE "SUGGESTIONS" THAT WOULD BE REVIEWED, AND POSSIBLY OVERRULED, BY THE OTHER LEAD TRAINERS. THIS WAS AN OBVIOUS LIE; HE WOULD BE PICKING HIS PEOPLE AFTER ONE WEEK, I KNEW.



I GOT A CALL FOR AN INTERVIEW THAT THURSDAY, BUT IF I TOOK THE INTERVIEW I WOULD HAVE TO BAIL ON THE JOB. SO I APPROACHED PAT AFTER THE DAY.



I GOT A CALL ABOUT A JOB. I KNOW YOU CAN'T TELL ME ANYTHING, BUT IF YOU WERE ME, WOULD YOU CALL THEM FOR THE INTERVIEW?

PAT ASKED ME A FEW QUESTIONS ABOUT MY WORK HISTORY. SINCE EIGHT OF THE ELEVEN WOULD BE MOVING ON, IT WOULDN'T BE THAT HARD TO DETERMINE WHO WAS STAYING ON.

DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT.

I WOULDN'T CALL THEM BACK.

I WAS DELIGHTED, AND I THINK I WENT OUT AND BOUGHT MYSELF A CD ON THE WAY HOME. THE NEXT DAY PAT HAD ALREADY MENTALLY CHECKED OUT OF THE PROGRAM AND CHECKED INTO HIS BAHAMAS HOLIDAY.

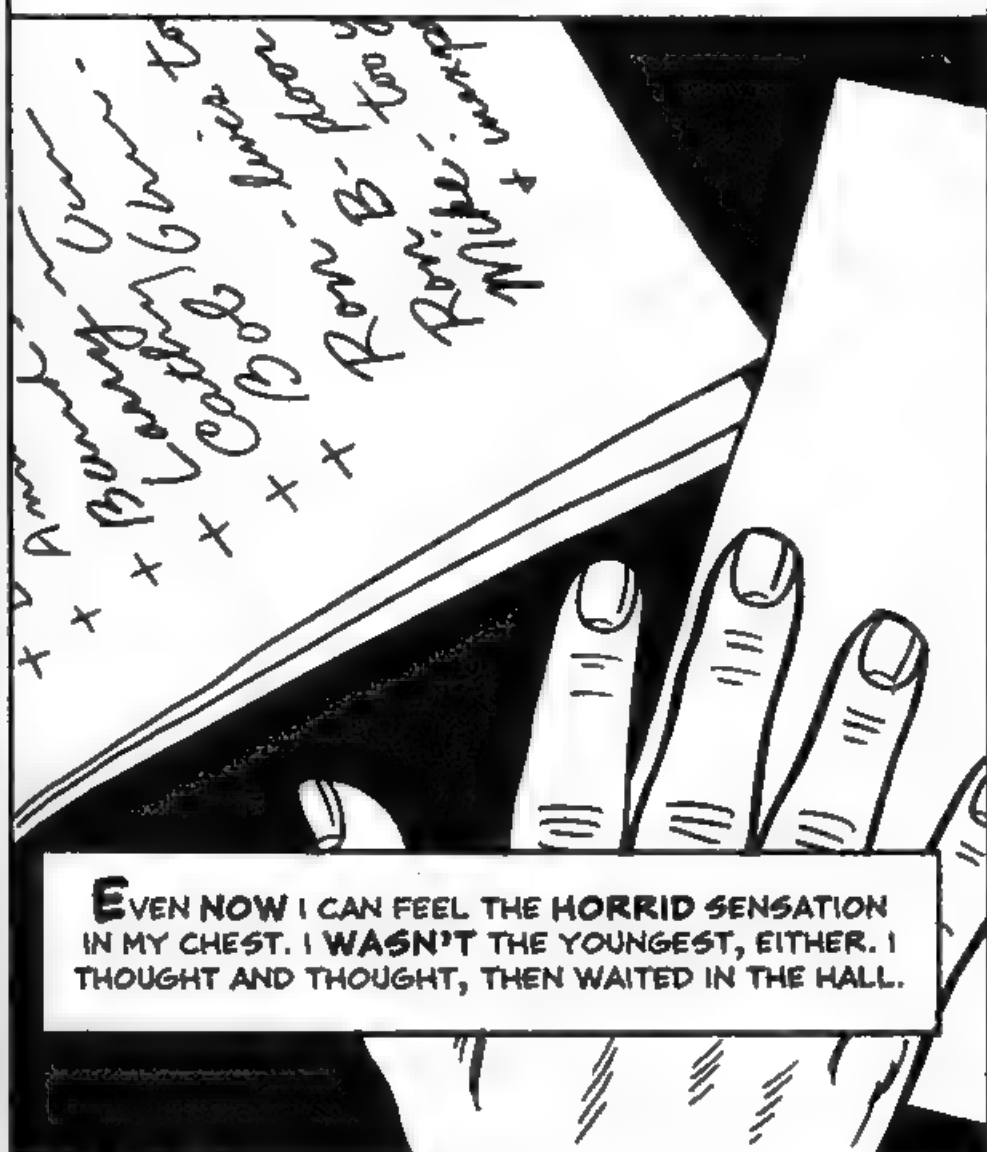


ONE OF THE ABSOLUTE, MOST IMPORTANT TRICKS I WOULD ADVISE ANYONE IS TO LEARN IS TO READ UPSIDE DOWN, A TALENT WHICH HAS SERVED ME VERY WELL IN MY BUSINESS CAREER. AS I LOOKED OVER AT PAT'S DESK, I SAW HE HAD THE CUT LIST ON TOP OF A STACK OF PAPERS.

IT WAS TOO FAR AWAY FOR ME TO READ - MY MYOPIA ISN'T JUST ETHICAL AND SOCIAL - BUT I COULD RECOGNIZE IT FOR WHAT IT WAS. NEXT TO EIGHT PEOPLE ON THE LIST WAS A + SIGN, AND NEXT TO MY NAME AND TWO OTHERS WAS ANOTHER SYMBOL - WHAT TO DO? I WAITED UNTIL LUNCH AND STOOD BY THE DESK WITH A BIG STACK OF OUR MATERIALS. I "ACCIDENTALLY" DROPPED IT, PAPERS GOING EVERYWHERE, AND AS I SCRAMBLED TO PICK UP MY STUFF I SWEEPED UP THE LIST AS WELL. I READ IT QUICKLY AND REPLACED IT, IN PLAIN VIEW.



SEVERAL PEOPLE "SAW" WHAT I WAS DOING BUT OF COURSE DIDN'T THINK ANYTHING OUT OF ORDER. WHAT HE HAD WRITTEN WAS -
 RON J: LIVES TOO FAR AWAY
 RON B: POOR GRASP OF MATERIAL
 MIKE: TOO YOUNG AND INEXPERIENCED



EVEN NOW I CAN FEEL THE HORRID SENSATION IN MY CHEST. I WASN'T THE YOUNGEST, EITHER. I THOUGHT AND THOUGHT, THEN WAITED IN THE HALL.

AS PAT CAME BACK FROM HIS CIGARETTE BREAK I STOPPED HIM.

I KNOW YOU WANT TO CUT ME, BUT I WISH YOU'D RECONSIDER. I WOULD WORK VERY HARD AT THIS JOB AND WOULD BE WONDERFUL, IF YOU COULD GIVE ME A CHANCE YOU'LL NEVER FORGET IT.

THIS REALLY MEANS A LOT TO ME.



PAT GAVE ME A LOOK THAT MAGICIANS GET FROM PEOPLE, AN EXPRESSION OF UTTER SURPRISE, AWE AND UNEASE.

I'LL THINK ABOUT IT.

I'LL THINK ABOUT IT.

MAN, YOU'VE GOT BIG BALLS.

I'VE GOT NOTHING TO LOSE AND I REALLY WANT THIS POSITION.

WEEKS LATER AFTER I WAS HIS BEST SUBORDINATE (SAVING THOUSANDS FOR THE COMPANY BY CONVINCING A CLIENT TO REMAIN ON THE PROJECT) I REMINDED PAT WHAT HAD HAPPENED.

I THOUGHT YOU WERE EIGHTEEN.

THE JOB WAS BEING A SOFTWARE TRAINER FOR THE BOARD OF EDUCATION. I HAD SOME QUALMS ABOUT WORKING FOR THE BOARD. BECAUSE I BELIEVE IN ABOLISHING PUBLIC EDUCATION, I FELT A BIT UNEASY WORKING FOR THE SCHOOL SYSTEM. BUT SINCE MY SALARY WOULD BE COMING FROM A PRIVATE CONSULTING FIRM - AND NOT THROUGH TAXES - I MADE MY PEACE WITH IT.

BUT I WOULD NOT TAKE GOVERNMENT MONEY OTHERWISE. I TAKE UNEMPLOYMENT SINCE THE TOTAL IS LESS THAN I PAID IN INCOME TAX, MEANING THAT I AM ONLY RECEIVING MY OWN MONEY BACK.

I WAS SENT BACK TO DISTRICT 22, WHICH WAS MY OLD DISTRICT FOR ELEMENTARY AND JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL. MY PARTNER WAS THIS WOMAN NAMED **SHELLY**. I HAD NO SUPERVISION - **SHELLY** AND I GOT A LIST OF SCHOOLS AND WE INDIVIDUALLY VISITED **TWO SCHOOLS A DAY**, ONE IN THE MORNING, ONE IN THE AFTERNOON. WE **TRAINED PRINCIPALS, ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS AND SECRETARIES**. EVERYONE **ADORED ME** BECAUSE I WAS AN **ALUM** AND BECAUSE I WAS OBVIOUSLY A **BRIGHT KID, A PEDAGOGUE'S FAVORITE THING**.



EVERY SO OFTEN WE GOT ALL THE OLD PRINCIPALS TOGETHER AT THE MAIN COMPUTER LAB. ONE WAS THE NEW PRINCIPAL OF MY OLD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, **PS312**. THE OTHER WAS THE PRINCIPAL OF MY JUNIOR HIGH, WHO HAD BEEN MY MATH TEACHER AT **CIG**. THE PRINCIPALS TOLD ME THEMSELVES THAT THEY WERE **WORSE** THAN THE STUDENTS. THEY WOULD **CHAT** IN CLASS AND NOT **PAY ATTENTION** AND TALK TO THEIR FRIENDS. IT WAS **SURREAL**.

WHAT WAS REALLY FUNNY WAS WHEN I PUT MY HAND ON MY OLD MATH TEACHER'S SHOULDER LEANED OVER AND **WHISPERED** IN HER EAR...



ONE TIME WE WERE ALL WAITING FOR A CERTAIN PRINCIPAL TO GET THERE. ONE OF THE PRINCIPALS TOLD ME TO **START...**



THE DISTRICT ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT HAD EVERYONE IN TERROR. JERRY HAD A REPUTATION FOR BEING A HARDASS AND ALL THE PRINCIPALS WERE SCARED. I LOVE PEOPLE LIKE THAT AND THEY LOVE ME. NO B.S. AND GAMES. DO YOUR JOB AND THAT'S ALL THERE IS TO IT.



JUST AS I
PREDICTED
WE HIT IT OFF
FANTASTICALLY.

JERRY
TALKS ABOUT
YOU LIKE YOU'RE
A GOD.



SHELLY QUICKLY BECAME A PROBLEM. ONE THING YOU NEVER EVER DO IS CONTRADICT YOUR PARTNER IN FRONT OF CLASS. YOU ARE A TEAM. IF YOUR PARTNER MIS SPEAKS, YOU TELL THEM SO DURING A BREAK AND ALLOW THEM TO CORRECT THEMSELVES LATER. THIS WAS ESPECIALLY THE RULE WITH THIS GROUP, WHO RESENTED HAVING TO LEARN THE BUDGETING PROGRAM WE WERE TEACHING THEM. ONE TIME SHE CORRECTED ME IN FRONT OF EVERYONE ELSE - AND SHE WAS WRONG.

...YOU ARE SO
WRONG...
-BAD-



ANOTHER TIME WAS WHEN SHE CAME IN VERY LATE AND I STARTED CLASS WITHOUT HER. A PRINCIPAL CAME IN LATE AS WELL, AND I PAUSED TO ASK SHELLEY TO PLEASE CATCH HER UP TO THE REST OF THE CLASS.



WE WOULD HAVE A CLASS IN THE MORNING AND ONE IN THE AFTERNOON. THERE WAS THIS ANNOYING SECURITY GUARD WHO WOULD COME IN THE ROOM TO CHECK E-MAIL AND DO ON-LINE CHATS. I TOLD HER THAT WE WOULD PROBABLY NEED THAT COMPUTER SHORTLY FOR THE AFTERNOON CLASS.



THE LAST STRAW WAS WHEN OUR CONTACT AT THE DISTRICT, STEVE, SAT DOWN WITH US. SHELLEY USED TO DRIVE ME TO WORK IN THE MORNING AND WE WERE OFTEN LATE AS A RESULT.



STEVE WAS EXTREMELY REASONABLE ABOUT THIS.

LOOK, I DON'T CARE IF YOU'RE LATE. JUST DON'T HAVE EVERYONE SITTING THERE FOR AN HOUR AND A HALF.

IT'S NOT FAIR TO THE PRINCIPALS. THEY HAVE A LOT TO DO BACK AT THEIR SCHOOLS. CALL US OR SOMETHING OR JUST START THE CLASS AN HOUR AND A HALF LATER!

WHAT DO YOU WANT, STEVE?



...AN HOUR BY HOUR ACCOUNTING OF OUR ACTIVITIES?

I IMMEDIATELY CALLED OUR CONSULTING COMPANY. IT'S ONE THING TO HUMILIATE ME IN FRONT OF THE CLASS, BUT THIS DISTRICT HAD PULLED OUT OF THE PROJECT THE YEAR BEFORE. IF THEY DID SO AGAIN IT WOULD PROBABLY COST ME MY JOB AND THE COMPANY A LOT OF MONEY.



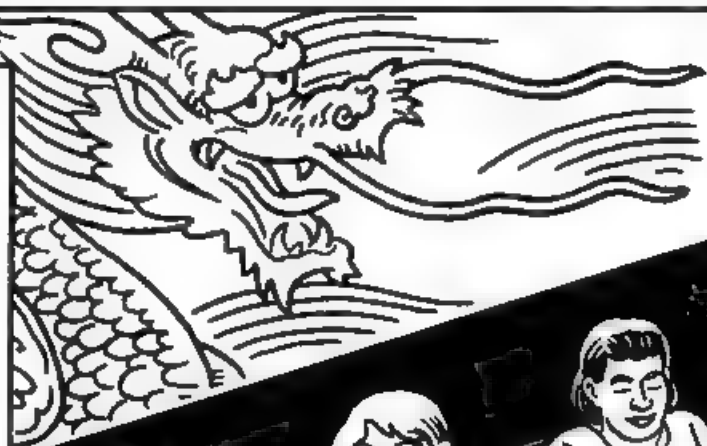
IT'S MY BIRTHDAY TODAY.

THE NEXT DAY SHELLY AND I WERE WORKING ON THE MANUAL. NO CLASSES WERE SCHEDULED.

I GOT YOU A BIG PRESENT, BUT IT'S A SURPRISE.

THAT NIGHT SHE GOT FIRED. HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

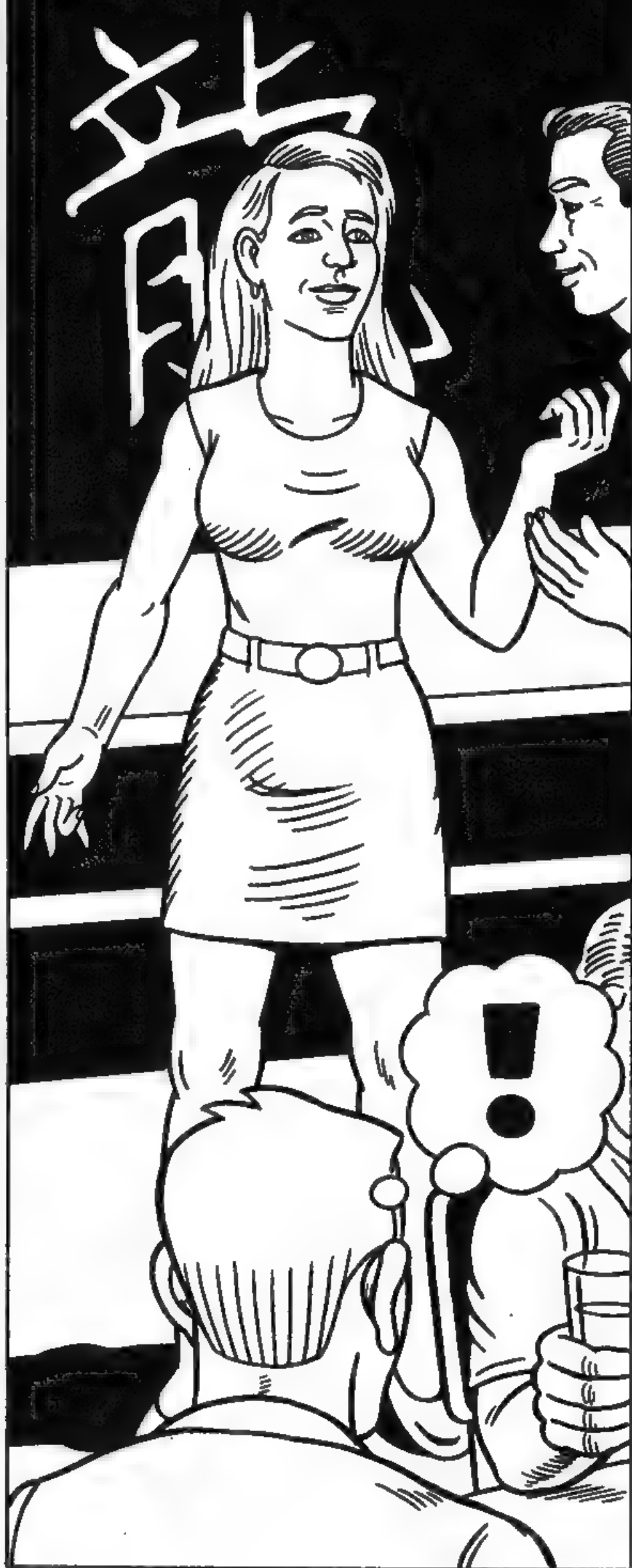
DURING THAT SUMMER I DIDN'T WORK. ANDREA RICH, WHO RUNS LAISSEZ-FAIRE BOOKS, INVITED ME TO A SEMINAR THAT THE MAGAZINE CRITICAL REVIEW WAS HAVING. IT WAS AN INTENSIVE THREE DAY COURSE IN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY AND THE WEAKNESSES OF LIBERTARIANISM.



THE PROFESSOR WAS THIS COMPLETE FOOL FROM COLUMBIA NAMED WILLIAM ROBBINS. THE NIGHT BEFORE THE SEMINAR ALL THE STUDENTS, ABOUT A DOZEN OR SO, MET WITH BILL AT A CHINESE RESTAURANT. BILL IS PRETTY YOUNG ACTUALLY. A FRIEND OF MINE DESCRIBED HIM AS...

BILL IS PRETTY SMART, BUT NOWHERE NEAR AS SMART AS HE THINKS.

I WAS SITTING TALKING TO PEOPLE WHEN THIS STUNNING GIRL, GRACEANN WALKED IN. BILL INTRODUCED ME TO HER AND WE REALLY CLICKED FROM THE WORD GO, TO AN EXTENT THAT HAD NEVER HAPPENED TO ME BEFORE OR SINCE.

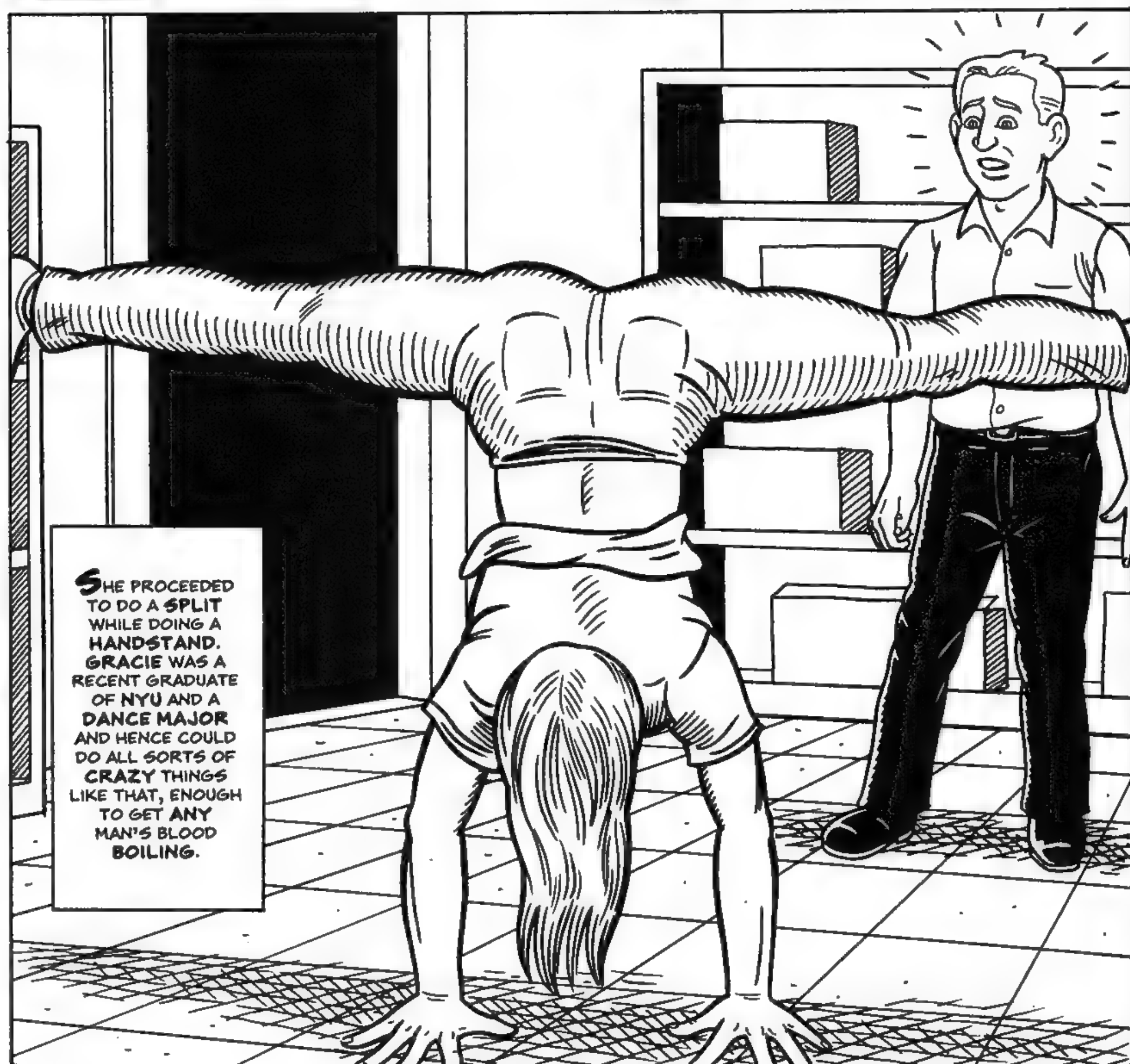


AFTER THE CHINESE RESTAURANT WE ALL WENT TO A BAR. WHILE MY COLLEAGUES WERE TALKING ALL ABOUT KANT AND THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL DIFFICULTIES OF REPRESENTATION IN A DEMOCRACY, I GRABBED HER AND WE CHATTED ALL NIGHT.



WE WERE JOINED AT THE HIP DURING THE WHOLE SEMINAR. IT WAS A THRILL, BECAUSE BILL WAS TRYING TO GET INTO GRACIE'S PANTS BUT FUMBLING.





THAT SEMINAR WHERE **BILL** TRIED TO RAM DOWN OUR THROATS HIS **ABSURD** THEORY THAT EVERYONE'S ACTIONS ARE MOTIVATED BY A **DESIRE** TO BE LOVED ("EXCEPT MAYBE MIKE") WAS THE **LAST** TIME I REALLY DISCUSSED **POLITICS** WITH PEOPLE. IT WAS ONCE AGAIN THE ENTIRE ROOM **ARGUING** WITH ME, ALL THESE **BRIGHT** **IVY** **LEAGUE** KIDS, AND I WAS GETTING NOTHING OUT OF IT.



THE **LAST** DAY OF THE SEMINAR WE ALL WENT TO DINNER. AS **GRACIE** AND I WERE WALKING HOME SHE **CONFESSED** TO ME THAT SHE JUST RECENTLY STARTED **GOING** OUT WITH A GUY WHO HAD BEEN A **SECRET** **CRUSH** OF HERS FOR YEARS.



I HAVE **NO** **PROBLEM** HANGING OUT WITH YOU, BUT I AM **NOT** INTERESTED IN BEING **FRIENDS** WITH YOU.

I JUST WANT TO BE **HONEST** AND UPFRONT ABOUT MY **INTENTIONS**. THERE IS **NO** **RING** ON YOUR FINGER AND THIS GUY IS IN **MEDICAL** **SCHOOL** IN **PHILADELPHIA**.

JUST SO WE'RE **CLEAR**.



THE NEXT FEW MONTHS WERE **PHENOMENAL**. WE HAD THE SAME **SICK** **SENSE** OF HUMOR AND E-MAILED EACH OTHER **SEVERAL** TIMES A DAY, TALKING AN **HOUR** EVERY NIGHT ON THE PHONE, HANGING OUT **EVERY** WEEKEND.



IT WAS A VERY **WEIRD** SITUATION BECAUSE SHE FELT **GUILTY** ABOUT FOOLING AROUND EVEN THOUGH THIS **WINNER** OF HER'S IN **PHILLY** TOLD HER THEY HAD AN **OPEN** **RELATIONSHIP**.



ONE DAY WHILE SHE WAS RUNNING SHE ALMOST FAINTED. SHE WENT TO THE DOCTOR AND HE SAW A BLUR ON AN X-RAY. HE WANTED HER TO GET A CATSCAN.

SHE WAS PETRIFIED. SHE WANTED ME TO GO WITH HER. THE NIGHT BEFORE, IN OUR TYPICAL GALLOW'S HUMOR WE WORKED ON HER OBITUARY, AND MY EULOGY FOR HER.



WE WERE GETTING READY TO SLEEP AND SHE WAS SITTING ON THE SIDE OF THE BED. HER SHOULDERS WERE HUNCHED OVER AND I'VE NEVER SEEN A PERSON LOOKING WEAKER OR MORE TERRIFIED IN MY LIFE.

AND FOR ONCE, A DISPLAY OF WEAKNESS DIDN'T TRIGGER FEELINGS OF CONTEMPT WITHIN ME. I WANTED TO TELL HER THAT EVERYTHING WOULD BE OKAY, NOT TO WORRY, ETC. I PUT MY ARMS AROUND HER AND HELD HER, THEN KISSED HER SOFTLY ON THE SHOULDER.



WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

WHAT?

YOU CAN'T DO THAT. I BELONG TO SOMEONE ELSE.



I COULDN'T BELIEVE HER. I WAS LIVID, BUT AT THE SAME TIME I KNEW THAT THIS WASN'T THE TIME TO ARGUE. I NEEDED TO SUPPORT HER AND MAKE HER FEEL SECURE.

GOOD NIGHT. I DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT ANYTHING. LET'S JUST GO MAKE SURE THAT YOU'RE FINE.



WE WENT TO THE CATSCAN PLACE IN THE MORNING. THE TEST CAME BACK SOON AFTER AND WAS POSITIVE. SHE HAD HODGKIN'S LYMPHOMA AND THERE WAS A TUMOR THE SIZE OF A PLAYING CARD IN HER CHEST.



THAT WEEKEND MY OLD FRIENDS FROM BUCKNELL, LAURIE, ANNE AND SUSAN, GOT TOGETHER WITH ME. I TOLD THEM THE SITUATION. THE IDEA OF ABANDONING HER AT THIS POINT WAS CRAZY TO ME, BUT THEY TOLD ME THAT WAS WHAT I HAD TO DO...

SHE CERTAINLY
ISN'T GOING TO
BREAK UP WITH THIS GUY
AT THIS POINT.

IT'S HIS ROLE TO
SUPPORT HER THROUGH THIS
NOT YOURS.

SHE'S
HAVING HER
CAKE AND EATING
IT TOO.

IT SOUNDED SO
COLD BLOODED TO
ME, AND I'M SOMEONE
WHO PRIDES HIMSELF
ON HIS COLD
BLOODEDNESS.

THAT WEEKEND I
BROKE UP WITH
HER. I COULDN'T
GO THROUGH THE
TREATMENT AND
HAVE TO WORRY
THAT EVERY TIME
I EXPRESSED
ANY GESTURE OF
WARMTH IT WOULD
BE INTERPRETED
AS SIMPLY TRYING
TO GET INTO HER
PANTS. SHE WAS
UPSET AND SO
WAS I.

THANKFULLY SHE
BEAT THE HODGKIN'S.



I SAW HER
TWICE SINCE THEN.
HER ANSWERING MACHINE USED
TO SAY, "I CAN'T ANSWER, I HAVE
CANCER" AND SHE WOULD TELL PEOPLE
THAT SINCE SHE BEAT CANCER SHE
COULD CERTAINLY KICK THEIR ASSES.

SHE REMAINS
THE ONLY PERSON I HAVE
EVER BEEN IN LOVE WITH.



SOON
AFTER THIS THE
BOARD OF EDUCATION
PROJECT ENDED. I DECIDED TO
TAKE SOME TIME OFF. I WAS STILL
HAVING NO LUCK GETTING AN AGENT
FOR MY NOVEL BUT WAS STEADILY
CONCEPTUALIZING THE RUBBER RODEO
STORY. THE MORE I THOUGHT ABOUT
IT, THE MORE I REALIZED THAT IT
NEEDED TO BE A SCREENPLAY
RATHER THAN A NOVEL, SINCE
SO MUCH OF THE BAND'S
APPEAL WAS VISUAL.

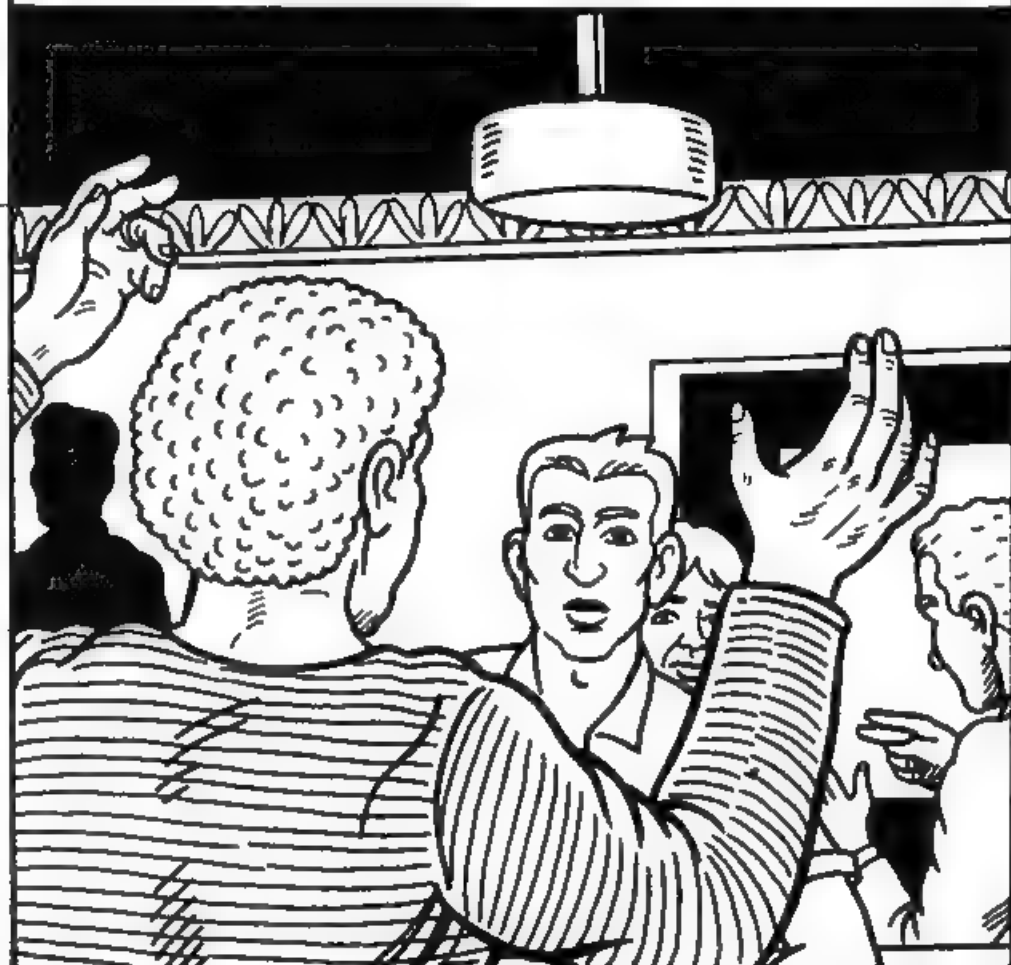
I ALSO
THOUGHT IT
WOULD BE BETTER TO
HAVE IT BE THE BAND'S
TRUE STORY SINCE THE
THINGS BOB, TRISH AND
GARY WERE TELLING ME
WERE UNBELIEVABLE IF
PRESENTED AS FICTION,
AND MUCH COOLER
AND FUNNIER THAN
ANYTHING I COULD
THINK OF.



AROUND THIS TIME WAS
WHEN I BROKE OFF
MY RELATIONS WITH MY
FAMILY. I HAD GOTTEN
BACK IN TOUCH WITH
FRIENDS WHO HAD KNOWN
ME AS A LITTLE KID,
DURING THE SUMMERS I
SPENT UPSTATE IN THE
CATSKILLS. ONE OF
THEM MADE AN OFFHAND
COMMENT ABOUT HOW
I WAS A CHUBBY KID.
THE OTHERS CONFIRMED.
THIS SENT ME REELING.
ALL MY LIFE, EVERY
TIME WE SPOKE, I WAS
CONDEMNED BY MY
GRANDMOTHER FOR
BEING TOO SKINNY.

YOU'RE LIKE
A SKELETON!

AND THE REALIZATION THAT THIS WASN'T TRUE, THAT SHE WOULDN'T BE HAPPY UNTIL I WAS "THE FAT KID" LIKE MY DAD WAS GROWING UP MADE ME DISGUSTED. WHEN I WAS IN COLLEGE I WEIGHED 100 LBS. I DON'T THINK THIS WAS ANOREXIA - I DON'T KNOW IF IT'S POSSIBLE TO BE SUBCONSCIOUSLY ANOREXIC - BUT I DO KNOW THAT I WAS NEVER HUNGRY, AND THIS WAS NO DOUBT ALL PSYCHOLOGICAL. I WAS HAVING DINNER WITH MY GRANDPARENTS AND MY GRANDMOTHER STARTED YELLING THAT I WAS DENYING MYSELF FOOD BECAUSE I WAS SPENDING ALL MY MONEY ON BOOKS AND CD'S.



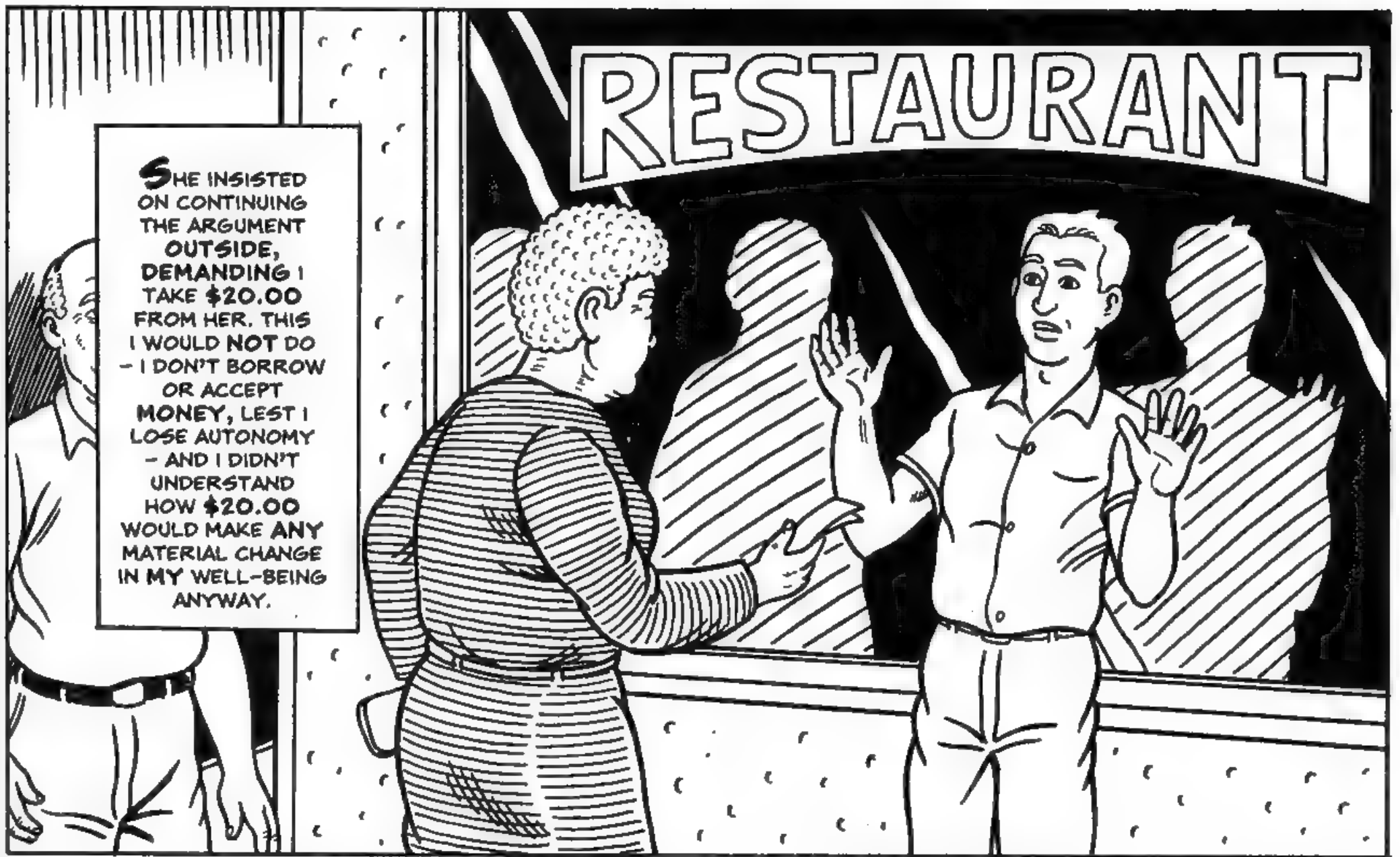
THE SALARY I WAS EARNING WAS VERY HIGH SO THIS WAS PURE PSYCHOSIS ON HER PART; SHE HAD NO IDEA - NONE - HOW I SPENT MY MONEY. I LOOKED AT HER WHEN SHE WAS SAYING THIS AND I REALIZED THAT THERE IS ABSOLUTELY NOTHING YOU CAN SAY TO A PERSON WHO WOULD FEEL COMFORTABLE SUGGESTING SOMETHING LIKE THAT, LET ALONE A DIRECT ACCUSATION. WE GOT TO ARGUING ABOUT THIS AND SHE ASKED ME IF, BASED ON MY TONE, I THOUGHT SHE WAS A BAD GRANDMOTHER. "NO", I SAID, "BUT I THINK YOU'RE A BAD PERSON."



SHE STARTED CRYING.



I HAD NO IDEA WHAT MY MOTHER HAD TO DO WITH ANYTHING IN THIS SITUATION, OTHER THAN THE FACT THAT THERE SEEMED TO BE SOME COMPETITION IN MY GRANDMOTHER'S MIND BETWEEN THEM. I TOLD HER THAT I WASN'T DEALING WITH THIS. WE PAID FOR THE CHECK.



SHE INSISTED ON CONTINUING THE ARGUMENT OUTSIDE, DEMANDING I TAKE \$20.00 FROM HER. THIS I WOULD NOT DO - I DON'T BORROW OR ACCEPT MONEY, LEST I LOSE AUTONOMY - AND I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND HOW \$20.00 WOULD MAKE ANY MATERIAL CHANGE IN MY WELL-BEING ANYWAY.

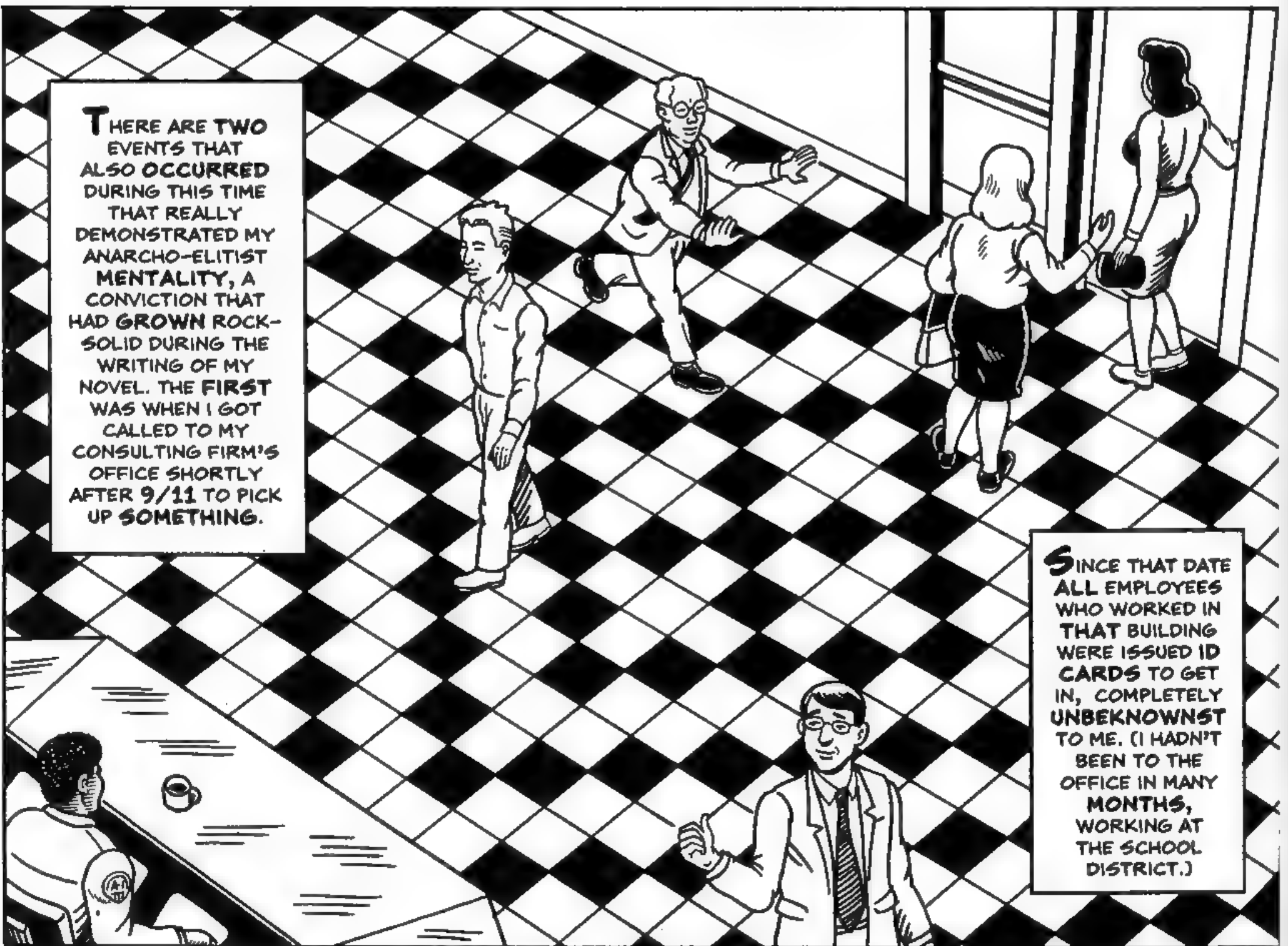
I PUT MY HEADPHONES ON AND WALKED AWAY. I THOUGHT ABOUT IT LONG AND HARD. DOES SPEAKING TO MY FAMILY GIVE ME PLEASURE? WHY DO I CRINGE WHEN THE PHONE RINGS, WONDERING IF IT'S THEM? WHY PUT MYSELF IN SITUATIONS THAT MAKE ME UNCOMFORTABLE? I WOULDN'T SPEAK TO THEM FOR THREE YEARS.



MY MOTHER AND I TALK, VERY RARELY, AND SHE IS NOT ALLOWED TO CALL MY HOME. I GAINED 40 LBS SINCE, A 40% WEIGHT GAIN. THIS WAS THE SIGN THAT MY PHYSICAL AS WELL AS MENTAL HEALTH WAS AT RISK IN DEALING WITH THESE PEOPLE.

THERE ARE TWO EVENTS THAT ALSO OCCURRED DURING THIS TIME THAT REALLY DEMONSTRATED MY ANARCHO-ELITIST MENTALITY, A CONVICTION THAT HAD GROWN ROCK-SOLID DURING THE WRITING OF MY NOVEL. THE FIRST WAS WHEN I GOT CALLED TO MY CONSULTING FIRM'S OFFICE SHORTLY AFTER 9/11 TO PICK UP SOMETHING.

SINCE THAT DATE ALL EMPLOYEES WHO WORKED IN THAT BUILDING WERE ISSUED ID CARDS TO GET IN, COMPLETELY UNBEKNOWNST TO ME. (I HADN'T BEEN TO THE OFFICE IN MANY MONTHS, WORKING AT THE SCHOOL DISTRICT.)



AS I WAS GOING TO GO UPSTAIRS, AS I HAD DONE MANY TIMES BEFORE, I WAS STOPPED BY THE GUARD. WITH ANY JOB THERE'S A WRITTEN, OFFICIAL DESCRIPTION AND AN UNSPOKEN YET UNDERSTOOD NATURE OF THE POSITION, AND THE LATTER IS THE REAL NATURE OF THE JOB.





ALTHOUGH A SECURITY GUARD IS OSTENSIBLY THERE TO PROVIDE SECURITY, HIS ACTUAL ROLE IS TO GIVE THE ILLUSION OF SAFETY TO SUBURBAN WOMEN. IF SOMEONE WANTS TO DO SOMETHING DANGEROUS, A SECURITY GUARD IS HELPLESS TO STOP THEM. MOST OLDER SECURITY GUARDS UNDERSTAND THIS. IF YOU'RE A YUPPIE IN A SUIT, YOU WILL NEVER GET STOPPED. IF YOU'RE A BIKE MESSENGER, THEY'RE ON YOU IN A HEARTBEAT. GO STAND IN AN OFFICE BUILDING LOBBY AND WATCH IF YOU DON'T BELIEVE ME.



THE GUARD STOPPED ME.

WHERE ARE YOU GOING?

LET ME SEE YOUR ID.

CGS.

THOUGH IT'S NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS.

I HAD, OF COURSE, NEVER BEEN ASKED FOR AN ID BEFORE AND DIDN'T UNDERSTAND WHY HE WASN'T STOPPING ALL THE OTHER PEOPLE.

WHAT FOR?

LOOK, IF I ASK YOU FOR ID YOU SHOW IT TO ME.

THEN HE PUT HIS ARM AROUND ME TO MOVE ME TO THE MAIN AREA.

AT THIS POINT ANOTHER GUARD CAME OVER AND WISELY ASKED ME (NOT HIS COLLEAGUE) WHAT THE PROBLEM WAS.

I DON'T KNOW, HE'S ASKING ME FOR ID WHEN I'VE NEVER HAD TO SHOW ID BEFORE.

SIR, SINCE SEPT. 11TH ALL EMPLOYEES WHO WORK IN THE BUILDING WERE ISSUED ID CARDS.

I'M SORRY, I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND THIS. I HAVEN'T BEEN TO THE OFFICE IN MONTHS.

I WAS THE MODEL OF DECORUM BECAUSE THE SECOND GUARD WAS RESPECTFUL. AND IF YOU ARGUE WITH ONE PERSON, IT'S ACCEPTABLE. BUT ARGUE WITH TWO AND YOU'RE A NUT.

DO YOU HAVE THE NAME OF SOMEONE WHO CAN SIGN FOR YOU?

I CERTAINLY DO.

AT THIS POINT THE FIRST SECURITY GUARD CAME OVER TO ME. THE POOR MAN DID NOT KNOW HOW TO LEAVE WELL ENOUGH ALONE, HE DID NOT KNOW THAT YOU DO NOT PURSUE POTENTIAL CONFLICT UNLESS YOU HOLD POWER OVER YOUR FOE.

LOOK, I WANT -

ALL I WAS DOING WAS AXING YOU FOR ID.

GO BACK TO YOUR POST. I HAVE NOTHING TO SAY TO YOU.

IT'S "ASK" NOT AXE. I'M DONE WITH YOU. GO OVER THERE.

I WAVED HIM OFF. HE WAS FURIOUS.

THE PERSON CAME DOWN FROM THE CONSULTING FIRM, I SIGNED THE PAPERS I NEEDED AND EVERYTHING WAS FINE. AS I WAS LEAVING THE FIRST GUARD CAME BACK UP TO ME:

I GOTTA SAY
SOMETHING TO YOU.

WHEN IT COMES TO CRUELTY I AM AN ARTIST. IT'S TOO BAD THERE'S NO WAY FOR ME TO MARKET THIS GIFT OF HURTFULNESS.

THEN LET ME EXPLAIN
SOMETHING TO YOU.

THERE'S A
REASON WHY SOME
PEOPLE WORK UPSTAIRS,
AND SOME PEOPLE WORK
THE DOOR.

HE WAS APOPLECTIC.

HE GOT
RIGHT IN MY
FACE AND
YELLED.

IF YOU
EVER COME BACK
HERE, I'M GOING TO TAKE YOU
OUTSIDE, TAKE OFF THIS JACKET
AND BREAK YOUR FUCKING
JAW.

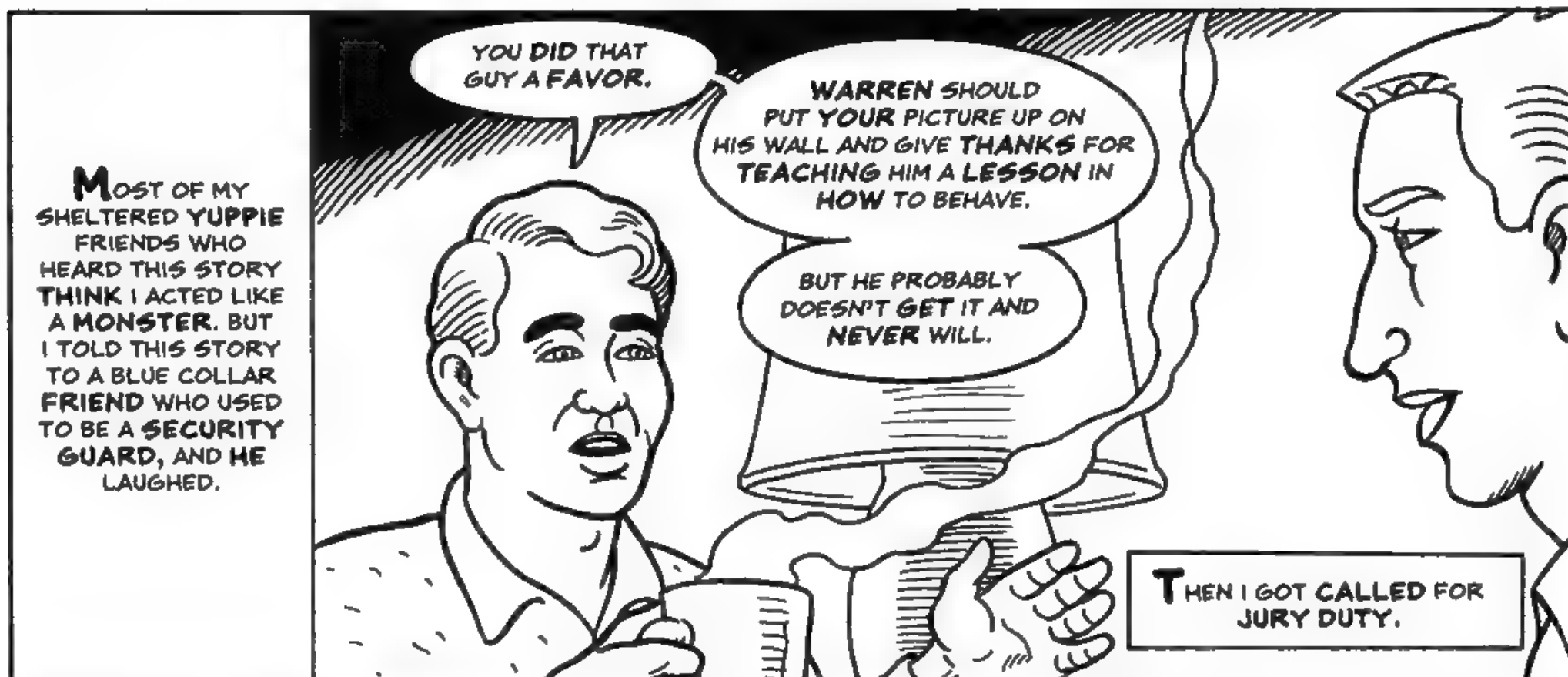
OH, REALLY.
HA!

WHAT'S YOUR NAME...

BEN?

WE'LL SEE
ABOUT THAT
BEN.

I FOUND A
COP, FILED A
COMPLAINT,
THEN I CALLED
THE BUILDING
MANAGER.
BEN GOT
FIRED.



MOST OF MY SHELTERED YUPPIE FRIENDS WHO HEARD THIS STORY THINK I ACTED LIKE A MONSTER. BUT I TOLD THIS STORY TO A BLUE COLLAR FRIEND WHO USED TO BE A SECURITY GUARD, AND HE LAUGHED.

YOU DID THAT GUY A FAVOR.

WARREN SHOULD PUT YOUR PICTURE UP ON HIS WALL AND GIVE THANKS FOR TEACHING HIM A LESSON IN HOW TO BEHAVE.

BUT HE PROBABLY DOESN'T GET IT AND NEVER WILL.

THEN I GOT CALLED FOR JURY DUTY.



I AM COMPLETELY AGAINST THE COMPULSORY JURY SYSTEM AND FIND IT DESPICABLE. THE FIRST ROOM I WAS CALLED INTO HAD US LISTENING TO SOME REVISIONIST HISTORY BY THE JUDGE.

200 YEARS AGO WOMEN COULDN'T SIT ON JURIES IN NEW YORK AND BLACKS WERE SLAVES.

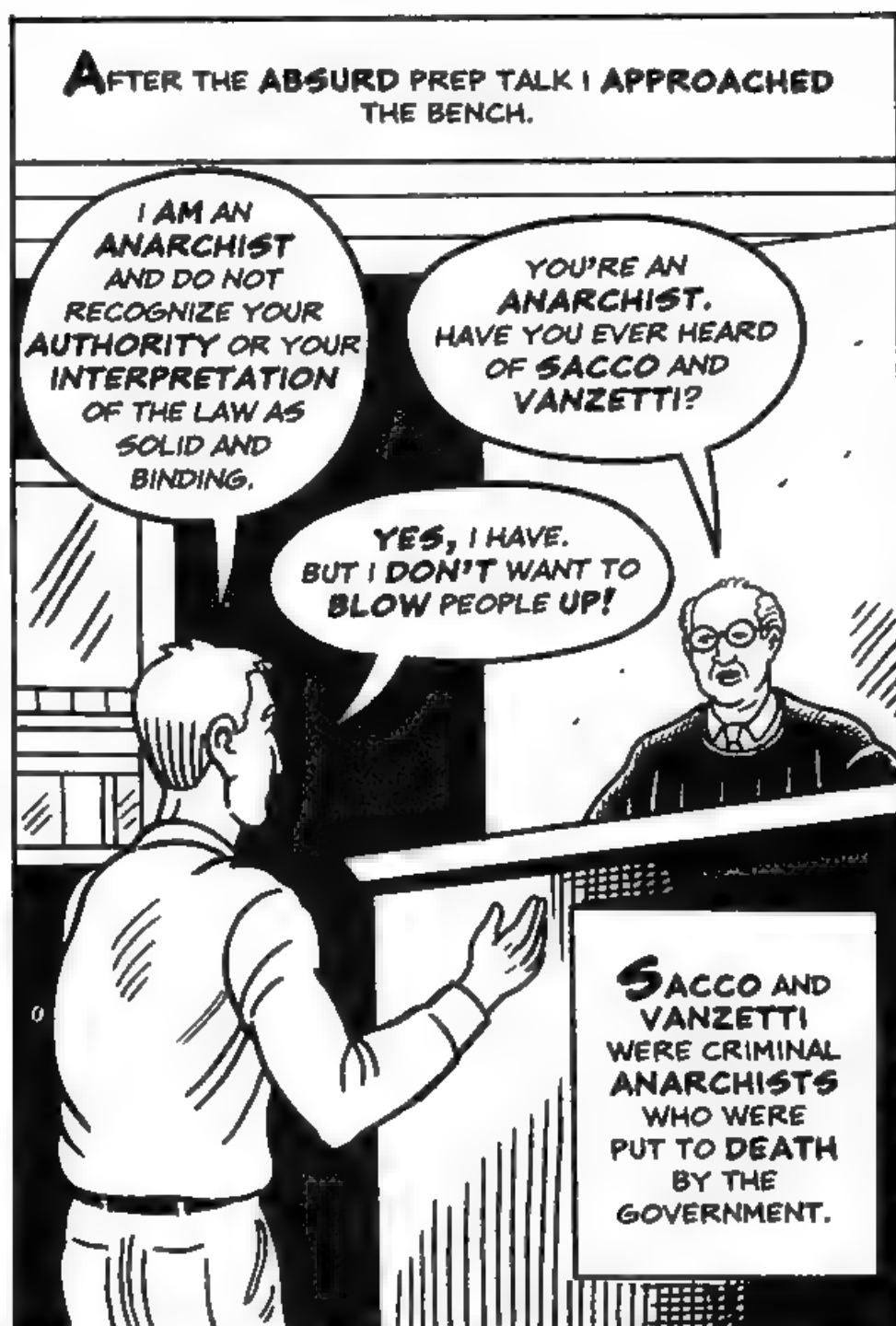
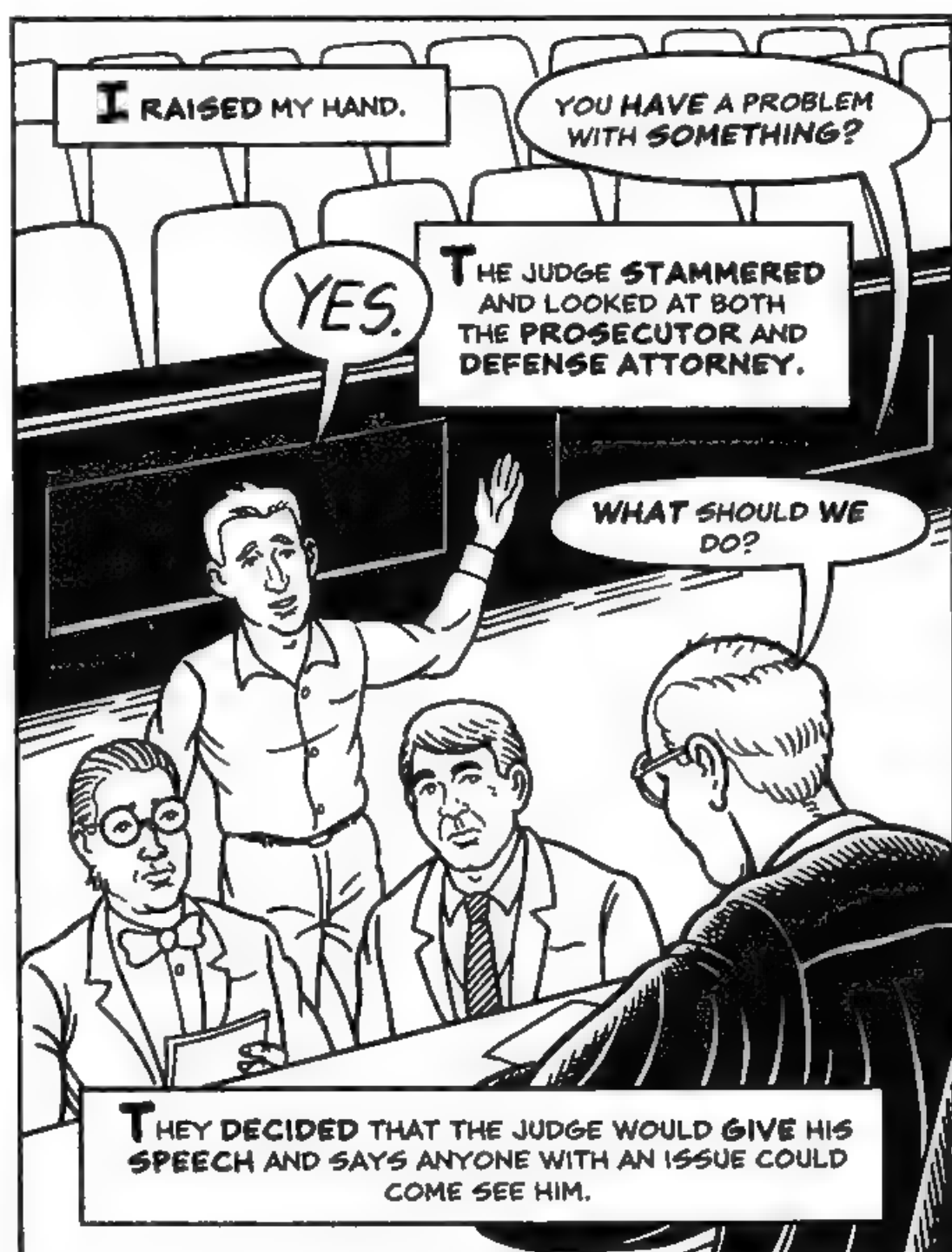
YOU ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT PEOPLE IN THE CASE BECAUSE YOU DECIDE THE TRUTH OF THE SITUATION.

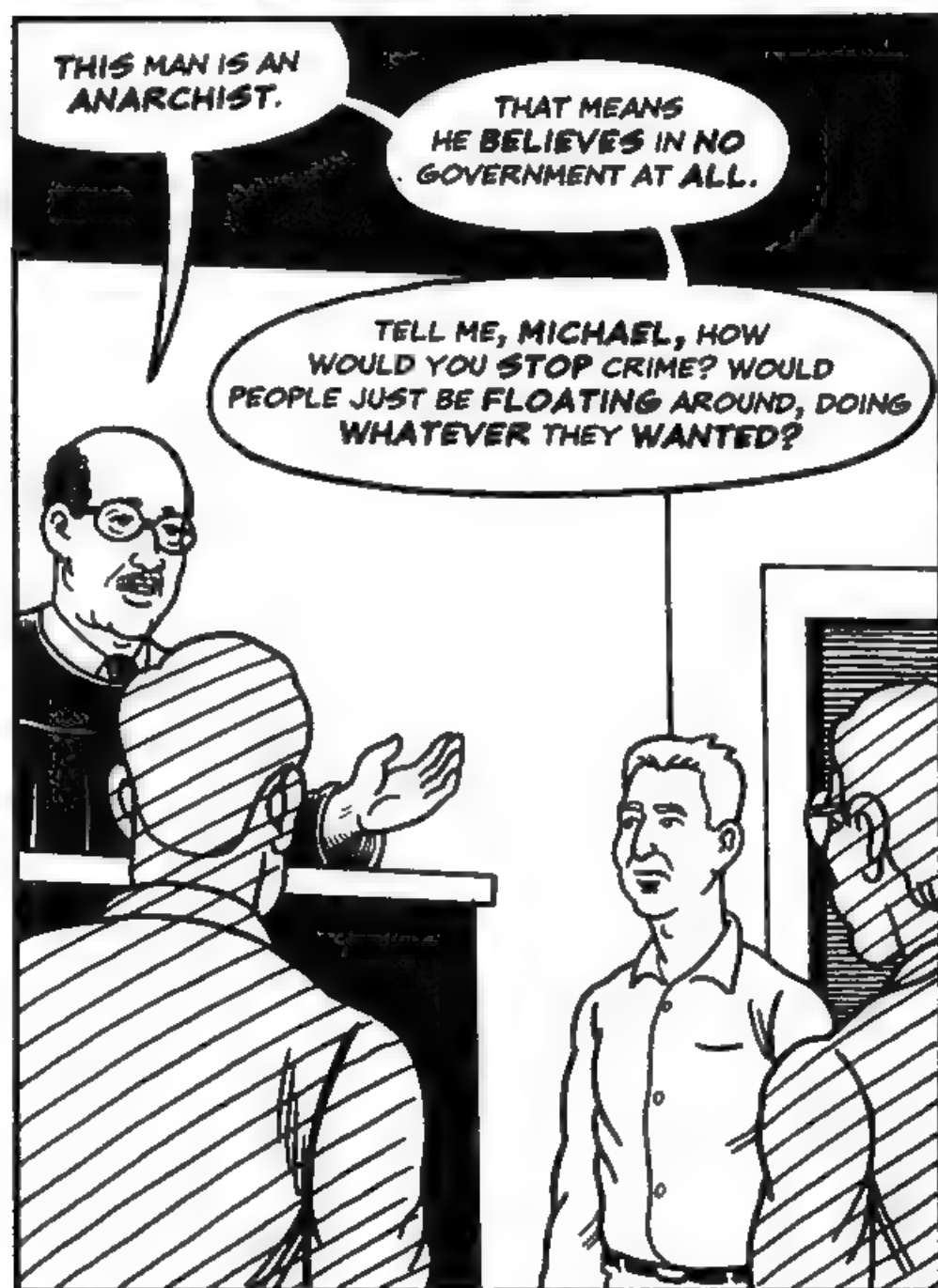
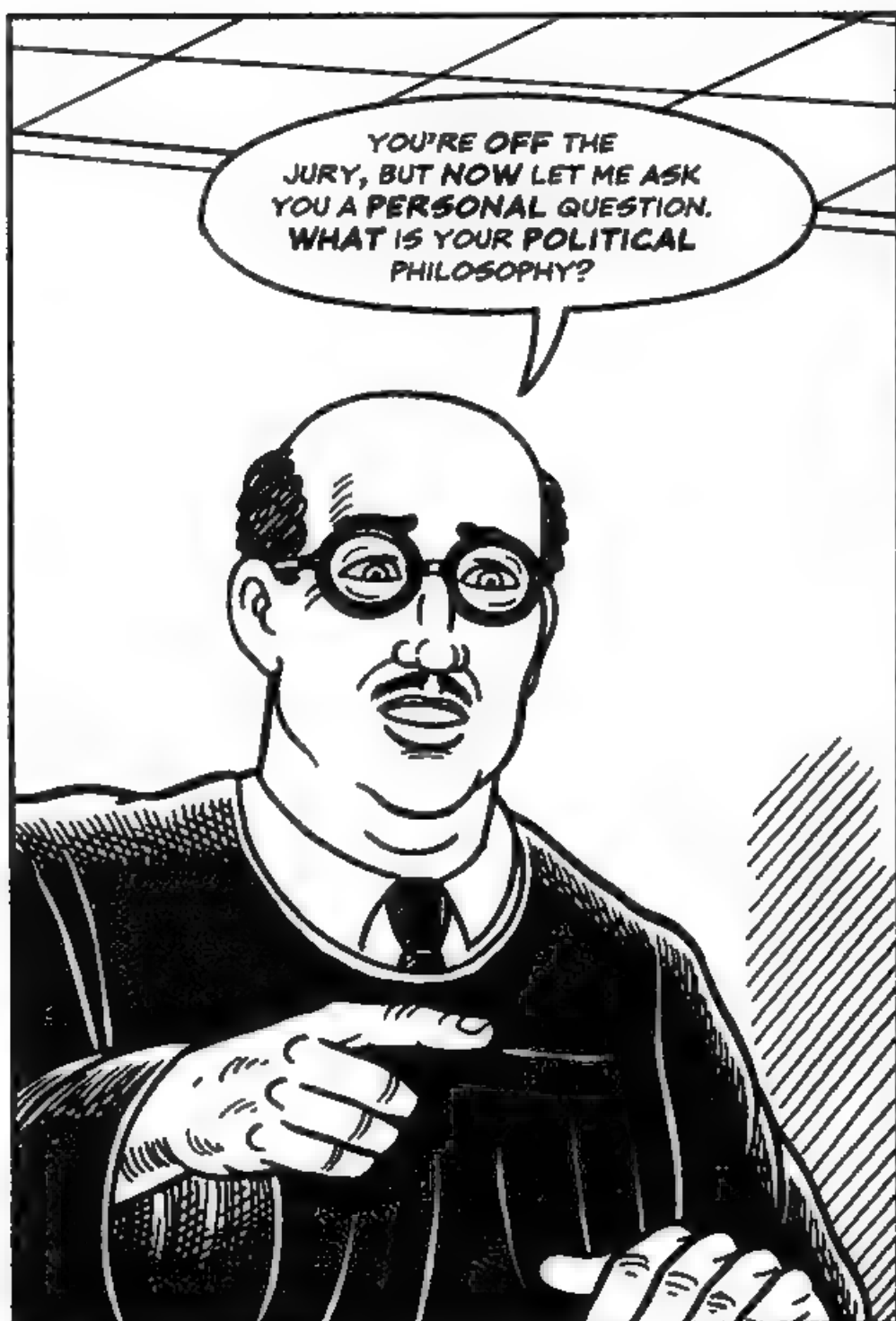


BUT THERE ARE CERTAIN THINGS THAT YOU HAVE TO UNDERSTAND BEFORE YOU CAN SERVE ON A JURY. FIRST OF ALL YOU HAVE TO UNDERSTAND THAT YOU HAVE TO FOLLOW THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE LAW IN MY COURTROOM AS I SEE FIT.

IF ANYONE HAS AN ISSUE WITH THAT, PLEASE LET ME KNOW.

HE OBVIOUSLY HAD BEEN SAYING THIS FOR YEARS AND NO ONE HAD EVER REGISTERED DISSENT.





THE LAST CASE WAS A SIMPLE ACCIDENT BETWEEN TWO PEOPLE WHERE THE PAIN AND SUFFERING AWARD WAS DISPUTED. AGAIN A JUDGE GAVE US A PEP TALK ABOUT HOW IMPORTANT WE WERE. I RAISED MY HAND...

IF I'M MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE ATTORNEYS, CAN I BILL AT THEIR RATE?

WHAT?

THE JUDGE DIDN'T HEAR ME.

BOTH SETS OF ATTORNEYS INTERVIEWED US INDIVIDUALLY.

FOR THE FIFTH TIME.

I AM AN ANARCHIST.

FURTHER, I'M SURE THE DEFENSE ATTORNEYS WANT SOMEONE MUCH STUPIDER THAN I FOR THE JURY.

THAT'S NOT ALWAYS THE CASE.

AS AN ANARCHIST WOULD YOU NEVER SUE SOMEONE?

YES, I WOULD AS A LAST RESORT.

AND WOULDN'T YOU WANT SOMEONE LIKE YOU ON THE JURY, SOMEONE FAIR?

YES, I WOULD.

HOW WOULD A CASE LIKE THIS BE SETTLED IN AN ANARCHIST SOCIETY?

IT WOULD PROBABLY BE SETTLED EXACTLY THE SAME, EXCEPT IT WOULD NOT BE FUNDED WITH TAX MONEY.

THE LAWYERS HUDDLED.

THIS GUY IS REALLY SMART AND REASONABLE. I THINK HE'D MAKE A GREAT FOREMAN.

THE OTHERS ALL AGREED.

I FELT POWERLESS AND AMAZED. I COULD HAVE MADE A SCENE BUT THE LAWYERS WERE BEING EXTREMELY FAIR SO I DIDN'T THINK IT RIGHT TO BE UNFAIR TO THEM.

I WON'T TAKE AN OATH OR BE SWORN IN.

I WAS DESPERATE.

THAT'S OKAY, I THINK WE CAN WORK AROUND THAT.

THANKFULLY, THE CASE WAS RESOLVED AND WE WERE ALL DISMISSED. BUT THAT SURE WAS A CLOSE CALL.

I TOOK A FEW MONTHS OFF AND KEPT PLUGGING AWAY AT MY SCREENPLAY. I MANAGED TO GET A REPUTABLE AGENT, WHICH IS A MAJOR STEP FOR ANY WRITER. I ALSO COMPLETED THE SET OF MEETING THE MEMBERS OF RUBBER RODEO.

THE FIRST WAS DOUG, WHO IS A CARTOONIST KNOWN FOR HIS STRIP STEVEN. I WENT UP TO HIS HOUSE IN UPSTATE NEW YORK. DOUG WAS FIRED FROM THE BAND, BUT REMAINED FRIENDS WITH EVERYONE (PART OF BOB'S TIGHT KNIT "RUBBER RODEO FAMILY").

HE AND GARY WERE AND REMAIN BEST FRIENDS AND EVEN DID A COMIC BOOK SERIES CALLED "IDIOTLAND". DOUG HAD BEEN THE ARCHIVIST, SO HE SHOWED ME VERY OLD PHOTOS AND OLD TAPES AS WELL.

HE CONFIRMED GARY'S IMPRESSION OF TRISH, WHICH WENT AGAINST WHAT I HAD BEEN THINKING.

I'M A PRETTY HAPPY PERSON AND SHE WAS A VERY UNHAPPY PERSON. AND WHEN TRISH WAS UNHAPPY, EVERYONE KNEW ABOUT IT. SO WE'RE OUT THERE TRYING TO HAVE EVERYONE HAVE FUN, HAVE A GOOD TIME, AND WE'RE DOING OUR BEST TO CHEER HER UP SO THE SHOW WOULD GO WELL.

I ACTUALLY GET ALONG BETTER WITH HER TODAY THEN I DID THEN. THEY'VE GOT MUCH BETTER DRUGS AVAILABLE NOW.

HI, TRISH!

AS DOUG DROVE ME BACK TO THE TRAIN STATION I ASKED HIM ABOUT BOB AND TRISH'S RELATIONSHIP.

WHAT HAPPENED?

HOW DID THEY BREAK UP?

YOU KNOW, I DON'T KNOW.

THEY WERE HAVING A KID AND THEY WERE GOING TO BE MARRIED, AND THE NEXT THING I KNOW BOB'S WITH SHERRY. JUST GREW APART, I GUESS.

I WAS AMAZED THAT DOUG, ONE OF THE CLOSEST PEOPLE IN THE WORLD TO THEM, WOULDN'T KNOW THE CIRCUMSTANCES REGARDING THIS BREAK-UP.

THEN I INTERVIEWED MARK A FEW WEEKS LATER. MARK QUIT THE BAND WITHOUT EVEN BOTHERING TO TELL THEM AND NEVER SPOKE TO THEM AGAIN. HE CAME UP TO NEW YORK AND WE SPENT THE DAY TOGETHER.



WAS IT WEIRD, TO BE IN A BAND WHERE THE SINGERS WERE A COUPLE?

I NEVER EVEN SAW BOB AND TRISH HOLDING HANDS.

WHAT?

YOU KNEW THEY WERE A COUPLE AND SO ON, BUT I NEVER SAW ANY SIGNS OF AFFECTION BETWEEN THEM, NONE!

THIS COMPLETELY BLEW MY MIND SINCE I HAD BEEN THINKING OF THE LOVE STORY BEING CENTRAL TO THE FILM. BUT NOW I WOULD HAVE TO RADICALLY REWRITE WHAT I HAD, WHILE TRYING TO UNDERSTAND THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THEIR UNUSUAL RELATIONSHIP. THAT NIGHT WAS A REAL TREAT FOR ME, AS TRISH JOINED MARK AND ME FOR DRINKS. IT WAS THE FIRST TIME IN 17 YEARS THAT THEY HAD SEEN EACH OTHER. THEY CAUGHT UP ON OLD TIMES AND TEAMED UP AGAINST ME.

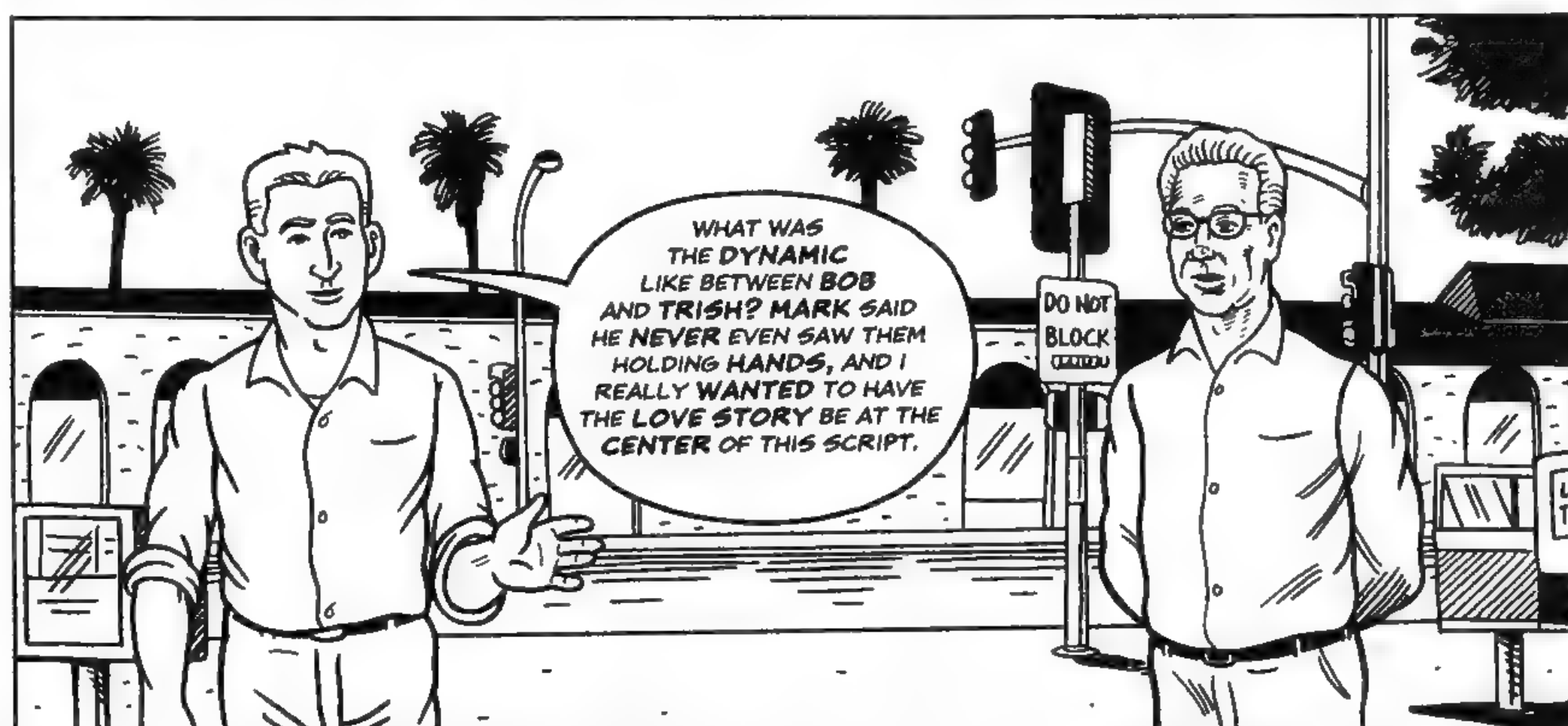
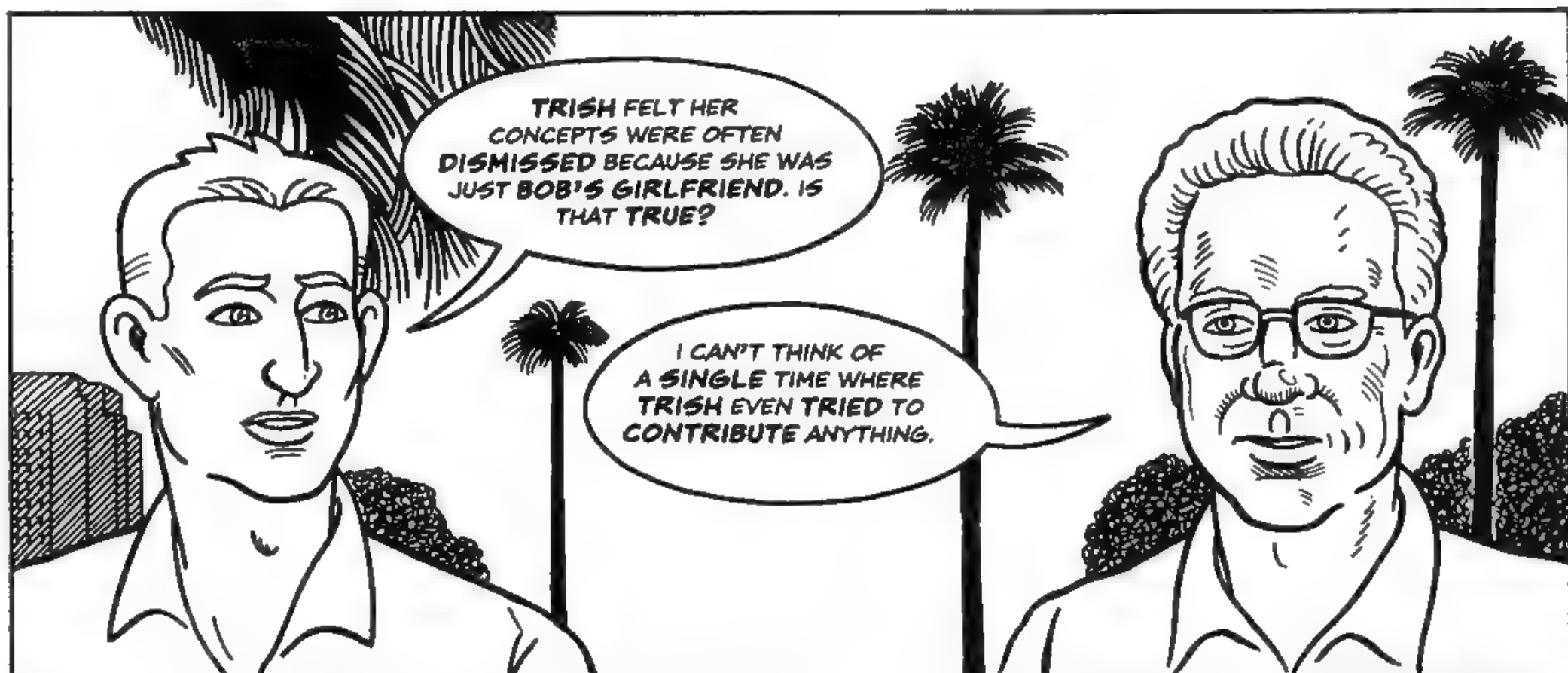


WHY ARE YOU WASTING YOUR TIME?

YES, YOU ACT LIKE WE DID THIS GREAT BIG THING, BUT WE DIDN'T DO ANYTHING. WE HAD NO FOLLOWING. ALL OF OUR GIGS SUCKED.

FINALLY I FLEW TO LA TO INTERVIEW BOB'S BROTHER BARCLAY. BARC USED TO DRESS LIKE A PRIEST AND DELIVER RIDICULOUS SERMONS DURING THE RR SHOWS. I ONLY MANAGED TO GET ABOUT THREE QUESTIONS IN BEFORE WE GOT INTO AN INTENSE DISCUSSION.





THEN BARCLAY BEGAN TO TELL ME HIS IDEA FOR THE DYNAMICS FOR THE SCRIPT: SPECIFICALLY, HAVING THE CHARACTERS FIGHT FOR SOMETHING, ALMOST ATTAIN IT THEN REALIZE THAT WHAT THEY WERE FIGHTING FOR ISN'T WHAT THEY WANTED ALL ALONG.

HAVE BOB AND TRISH REALIZE THAT FAME AND FORTUNE AREN'T IMPORTANT; THEIR FRIENDSHIPS WITH THESE PEOPLE ARE WHAT MATTER. OR THE FACT THAT YOU AND THE GUY WHO PUT TOGETHER THE WEBSITE ABOUT US ARE STILL INTERESTED IS WHAT MATTERS.

YOU CAN'T SIT THERE AND TELL ME THAT YOU WORKED HARD FOR YEARS ONLY TO HAVE SOME JERK FROM BROOKLYN COME INTERVIEW YOU AND THAT MAKES IT ALL WORTHWHILE. THE THEME OF THIS BOOK IS NIHILISM.

YOU GUYS PLAYED BY THE BOOK: YOU DID ALL THE RIGHT THINGS. YOU DIDN'T DO DRUGS, YOU FIRED YOUR BEST FRIEND BECAUSE HE SUCKED, YOU TONED DOWN THE SELF-INDULGENT ELEMENTS OF THE ACT, YOU REFINED THE SONGWRITING AND YOU WENT NOWHERE.

YOU'RE NOT EVEN FONDLY REMEMBERED AS A CULT ACT. EVERYTHING THAT YOU DID HAS BEEN COMPLETELY FORGOTTEN, AND THAT IS A HORRIFYING PROSPECT TO CONSIDER, THIS IDEA THAT PERSEVERANCE WON'T NECESSARILY GIVE YOU RESULTS. I DIDN'T WANT TO CHOOSE THIS MESSAGE BUT THAT'S THE ONLY THEME ORGANIC TO THE HISTORY OF THE BAND.

HERBERT

I FINISHED THE SCRIPT SOON AFTER THAT AND GOT LOTS OF FEEDBACK FROM EVERYONE, ESPECIALLY GARY'S WORK PARTNER JOHN.

JOHN AND GARY DO ANIMATION TOGETHER UNDER THE NAME OF TWINKLE. THEY WERE WORKING ON A MOVIE CALLED "AMERICAN SPLENDOR" AT THIS TIME. I HAD NEVER HEARD OF IT BUT THEY WERE VERY EXCITED ABOUT THE PROJECT.



AFTER I FINISHED THE SCRIPT I WAS WAITING FOR GARY TO GET BACK TO ME. GARY HAD BEEN TALKING IT UP WITH HIS FILM CONNECTIONS. BUT AT THE SAME TIME HE WAS EXTREMELY BUSY AND COULDN'T FIND THE TIME TO SIT DOWN AND READ IT ALL THE WAY THROUGH. FORTUNATELY I GOT A CALL FROM MY OLD JOB, TRAINING BUDGETING SOFTWARE FOR THE BOARD OF ED. IT WAS A 3 MONTH ASSIGNMENT AND I HAD LOVED IT BEFORE SO I SIGNED BACK ON. I WAS TOLD IT WOULD BE THE SAME. IT WASN'T.

THE SAME?!



I CAME IN FIRST THING IN THE MORNING AND THERE WERE ABOUT 9 TRAINERS AND STEVE, THE "SENIOR LEAD TRAINER." STEVE WAS ABOUT 32 WITH AN UNDERBITE AND RECEDING HAIR LINE. THE FIRST THING HE SAID WAS:

LET'S GO AROUND THE TABLE AND DO INTRODUCTIONS. I KNOW WHO YOU ARE AND YOU KNOW WHO I AM, BUT YOU SHOULD KNOW WHO EACH OTHER IS.

I HAVE NO IDEA WHO YOU ARE, BUT I KNOW WHAT YOU ARE. YOU ARE CLEARLY AN ASSHOLE.

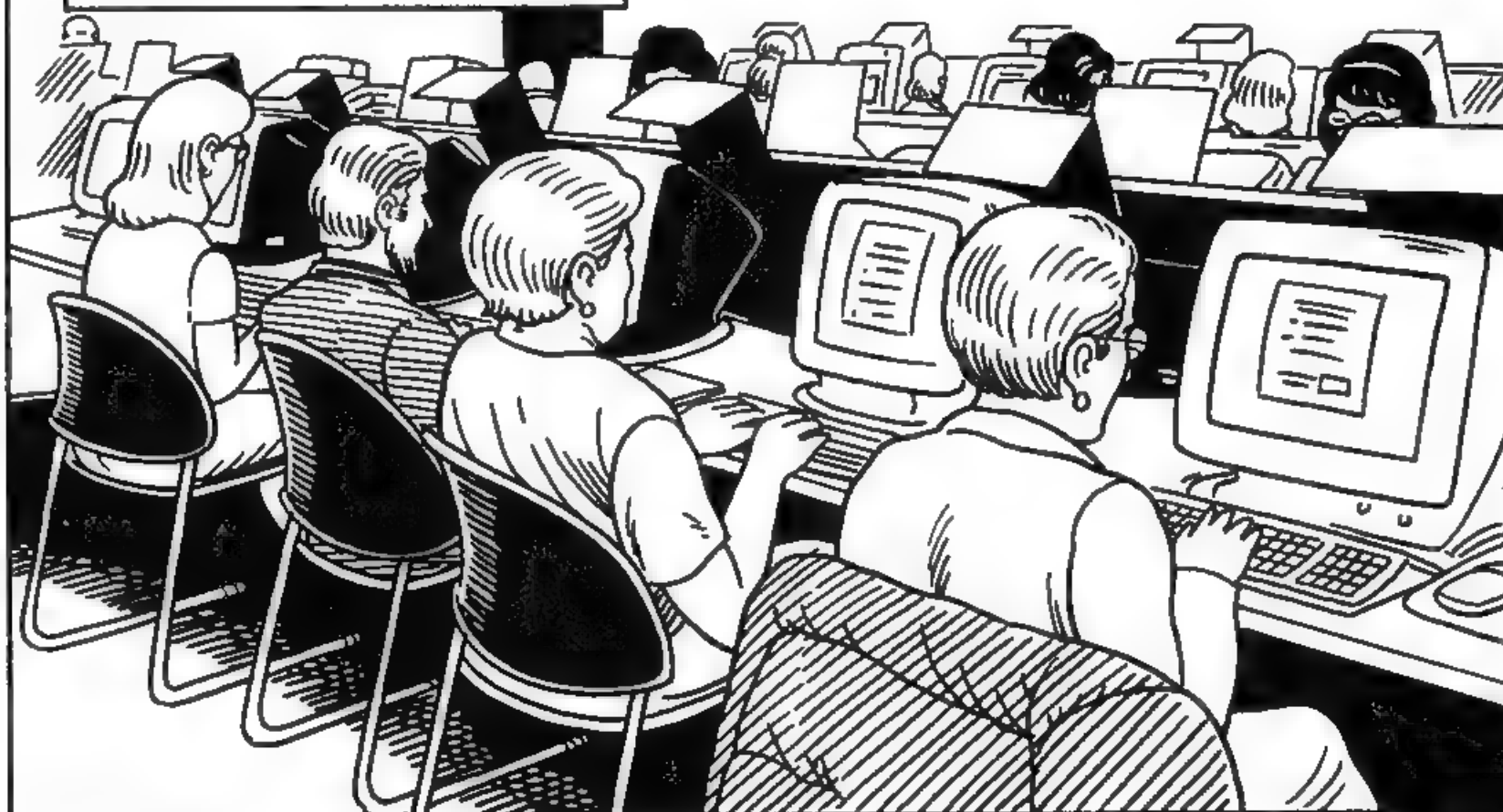


DID HE THINK HE WAS CHER OR TOM CRUISE THAT I SHOULD HAVE ANY CLUE ABOUT HIM?

THE JOB WAS A NIGHTMARE. THE NEW VERSION OF THE SOFTWARE WAS NOT READY FOR RELEASE. IT DIDN'T WORK PROPERLY AND THE PROGRAMMERS WERE WORKING ON IT WHILE WE WERE OUT TEACHING, MEANING THAT THE PROGRAM ITSELF WAS IN A STATE OF FLUX WITH REGARD TO ITS FUNCTIONALITY. THERE WERE BUDGET CUTS AS WELL, MEANING WE WERE ALL TEACHING OVERBOOKED CLASSES.



35 PEOPLE ON 30 COMPUTERS.



THESE PEOPLE, FURTHER, WERE FROM THE CHANCELLOR'S DISTRICTS WHICH MEANT THAT THE CHANCELLOR REMOVED THE SCHOOL FROM WHATEVER DISTRICT IT WAS IN AND ASSIGNED IT TO A DISTRICT UNDER HIS DIRECT SUPERVISION. HORRIBLE PEOPLE.

THE PROGRAM DEMANDS THAT ALL PERSONNEL ASSOCIATED WITH YOUR SCHOOL BE ASSIGNED A GRADE. IF THIS IS NOT THE CASE YOU GET A PERSONNEL ALLOCATION SCREEN WHEN YOU LOG ON. WHAT YOU DO IN TRAINING IS JUST SHOVE EVERYONE INTO SOME ARBITRARY GRADE SINCE TRAINING DATA IS JUST FOR PRACTICE.



WHEN I STARTED TEACHING THAT MORNING, EVERYONE WHO LOGGED ON GOT THE PERSONNEL ALLOCATION SCREEN.

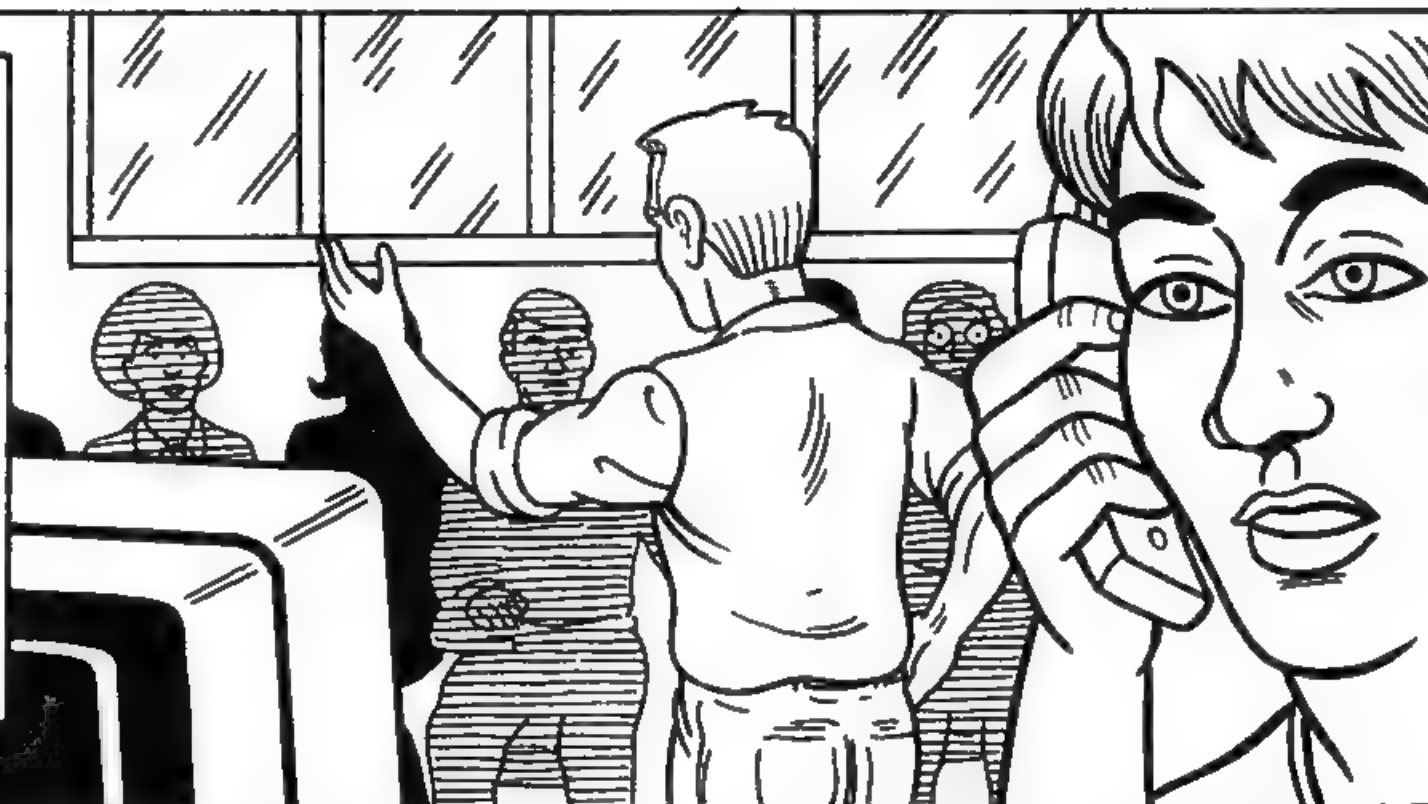
BUT THE PROGRAM WOULD NOT LET PEOPLE ASSIGN GRADES TO THE PERSONNEL, WHICH MEANT THAT EVERYONE WAS STUCK AND COULD NOT GET INTO THE MAIN PROGRAM.

IF THIS HAPPENED IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR HEADS WOULD ROLL.

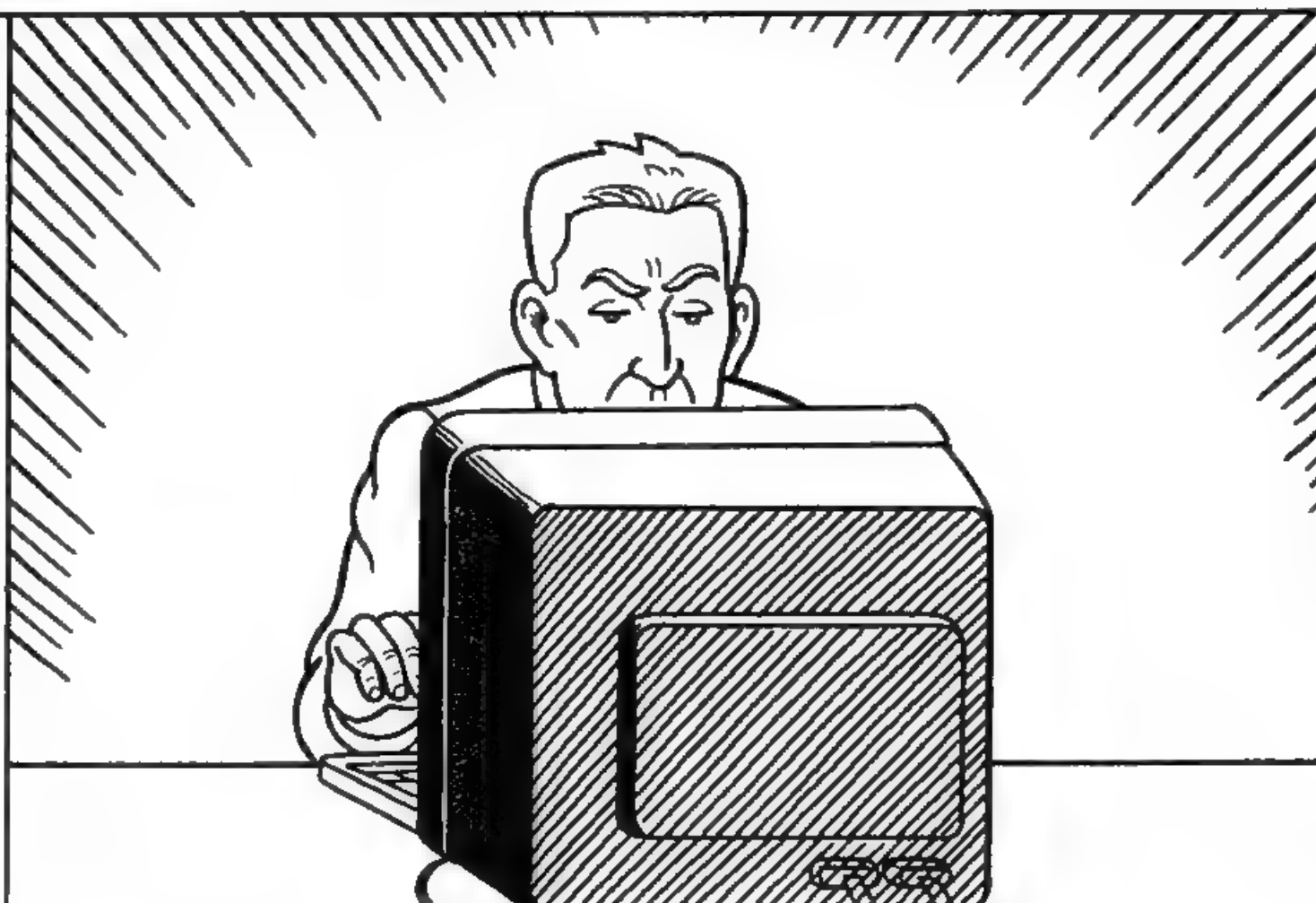
BRINGING IN PEOPLE FROM ALL ACROSS THE CITY ONLY TO HAVE THE PROGRAM NOT WORKING IS UNHEARD OF.



WE CALLED THE PROGRAMMERS AT THE HELP DESK. THEY CAME IN AN HOUR AFTER CLASS STARTED SO THAT THERE WAS NO ONE WHO COULD HELP US (ME AND MY PARTNER REGINA). SO I STARTED DOING A DEMO IN FRONT OF THE CLASS WHILE REGINA TRIED TO GET HOLD OF SOMEBODY. AFTER A WHILE THE PROBLEM WAS FIXED AND WE TAUGHT THINGS NORMALLY.



BUT STEVE'S PARTNER, THE LEAD TRAINER, FIONA, SENT US AN E-MAIL: "I WOULD LIKE YOU TO REFLECT ON TODAY'S SESSION/ SITUATION AND SEND ME AN E-MAIL DETAILING YOUR OPINION AND WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN DONE TO IMPROVE OR CONTRACT THE TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES OF THE SITUATION." NOT A THANKS FOR PUTTING UP WITH AN UNPROFESSIONAL SITUATION OR HAVING TO TEACH A PROGRAM THAT WAS NOT READY FOR PRIMETIME. I HELD MY TONGUE.



A FEW DAYS LATER STEVE AND FIONA CALLED A MEETING AND SPENT THE WHOLE MORNING BERATING US, EVERY PERSON OF WHICH (BESIDES ME AND ANOTHER) WERE OLDER THAN THE TWO OF THEM. STEVE TOLD US:

YOU ARE NOT TO SAY ANYTHING ABOUT THE PROGRAM IS WRONG.

THE PROGRAM IS PERFECT.

WE LOVE THE PROGRAM.

YOU HAVE TO BE MARTYRS FOR THE PROGRAM.

IF SOMETHING GOES WRONG, APOLOGIZE AND SAY THAT YOU DID NOT SET UP THE TRAINING DATABASE CORRECTLY.

ALSO, IF WE ARE SITTING IN ON YOUR CLASS, YOU ARE NOT TO SPEAK TO US OR ASK US QUESTIONS. YOU ARE TO PRETEND THAT WE ARE NOT THERE.

FIONA CONTINUED:

YOU ARE NOT ALLOWED IN THE ROOM ACROSS THE HALL FROM THE MAIN ROOM WHERE STEVE AND I SIT, AND I NEVER GOT A RESPONSE ABOUT THAT E-MAIL I SENT.

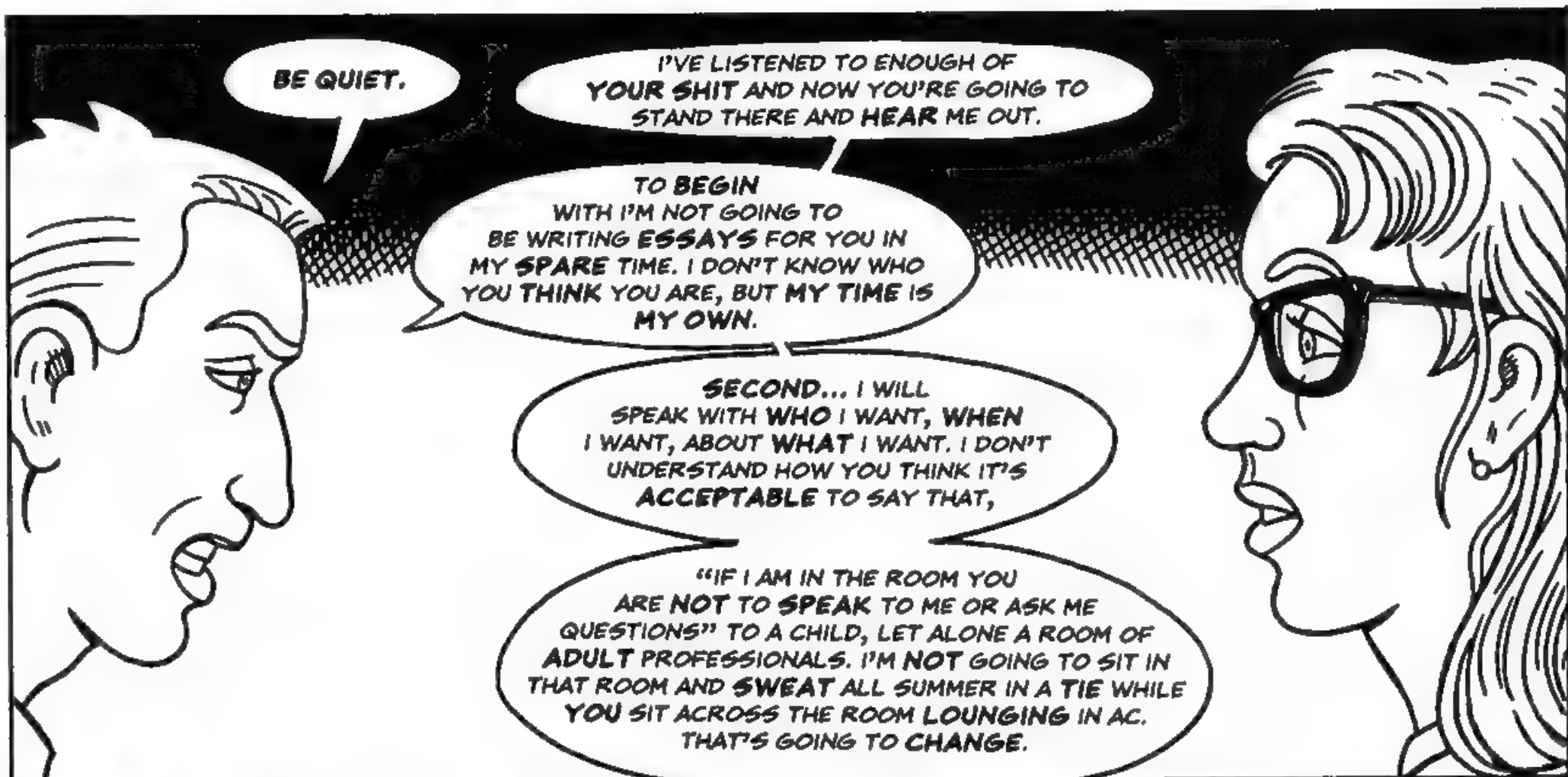
I EXPECT ESSAYS FROM ALL OF YOU.

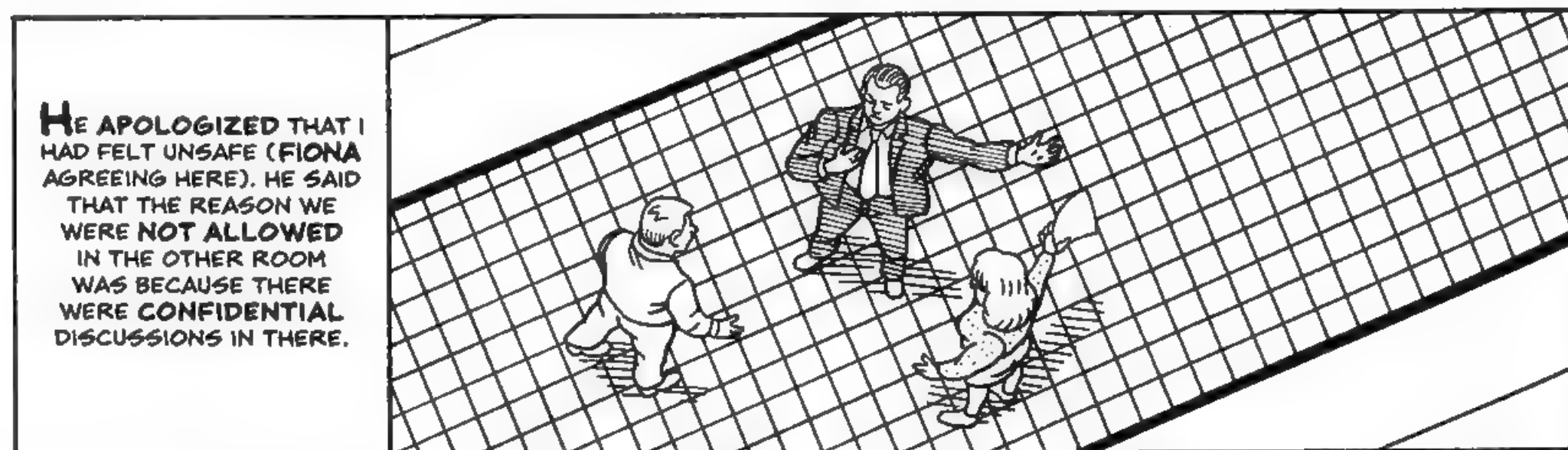
THIS WAS PSYCHOSIS, BUT I COULDN'T REALLY QUIT. I HAD A CONTRACT SIGNED, PLUS I DID NOT WANT TO SCREW OVER MY CONSULTING FIRM BY WALKING...

I COULD SEE THAT STEVE AND FIONA WERE MAD WITH WHAT LITTLE POWER THEY HAD, SO I KNEW THAT ANY CONFRONTATION WITH THEM WOULD LEAD TO THEM FIRING ME, WHICH WAS FINE. ACCORDINGLY, I PULLED FIONA ASIDE THAT MONDAY, ASKING TO SPEAK TO HER.

YOU TOLD US TO THINK ABOUT LAST MONDAY'S CLASS AND I DID SO OVER THE WEEKEND, AND I'VE REACHED THE CONCLUSION THAT YOU'VE GOT A REAL ATTITUDE PROBLEM, AND IT'S GOING TO END YESTERDAY.

I TH---







HE ALSO INSISTED, REPEATEDLY, THAT IF THERE WERE ANY ISSUES THEY NEEDED TO BE ESCALATED TO HIM.

PEOPLE CAN FREQUENTLY RESOLVE MATTERS THEMSELVES. THERE WAS NO REASON TO BRING THIS TO YOUR ATTENTION.

ESPECIALLY GIVEN HOW MUCH HE HAD ON HIS PLATE.

ANYTIME I DISAGREED WITH ONE OF HIS ASSERTIONS HE IMMEDIATELY SLAMMED ME AS "SUBORDINATE AND UNPROFESSIONAL." HE SAID HE DID NOT APPRECIATE MY TONE OR HOW I CHOSE TO APPROACH MATTERS.



DO YOU APPRECIATE THE IRONY?

HE WANTED ME TO TELL HIM WHAT PROBLEMS I HAD WITH FIONA, AND I TOLD HIM I WOULD NOT DO SO IN FRONT OF HER.



SHE LEFT BUT AS SHE LEFT TOLD US:

THE FIRST WEEK
MICHAEL CAME UP TO ME
AND TOLD ME YOU WERE
AN ASSHOLE.

THIS WAS FOOLISH OF HER TO BRING UP, SINCE WHAT HAPPENED WAS I ASKED FIONA IF HE WAS AN ASSHOLE, AND SHE TOLD ME HE WAS ON A MAJOR POWER TRIP AND THAT HIS USE OF THE TITLE "SENIOR LEAD TRAINER" BOTHERED HER.



I ALSO SAID THAT IF I THOUGHT HE WAS AN ASSHOLE I WOULDN'T BE WASTING ANY TIME TALKING TO HIM.



HE REITERATED THAT I SHOULD BE FUDGING THE TRUTH IN FRONT OF THE CLASS.

TECHNICALLY, IF YOU DIDN'T CHECK THE DATABASE BEFOREHAND, YOU DIDN'T SET IT UP CORRECTLY.

YOU CAN SPIN A MAZE OF WORDS ALL YOU WANT, BUT I FIND LYING TO BE UNNECESSARY, UNETHICAL AND UNBECOMING. SINCE I'VE TRAINED ON A WORSE VERSION OF THE PROGRAM MYSELF, I COULD MANAGE A CLASS IF SOME FUNCTIONALITY IS QUIRKY WITHOUT FREAKING THE CLASS OUT. YOU WON'T BE DRAGGING ME INTO YOUR MORAL DEGENERACY.



A black and white line drawing of four people in a hallway. A man in a suit and tie stands in the center, gesturing with both hands raised. To his left, a woman with glasses and a man in a suit are looking at him. To his right, a woman with a large hat and a man are also looking at him. The background consists of vertical lines representing a hallway.

WHO DO THESE DOUCHEBAGS THINK THEY ARE? THEY'RE TRYING TO FIRE YOU AND THEY CAN'T.

**MEANWHILE,
IT WOULD
HAVE TAKEN
VANESSA 45
MINUTES TO
REACH THAT
SCHOOL, BUT
1 1/2 HOURS
TO REACH THE
SCHOOL BY ME.
I WAS GOING
TO QUIT THE
NEXT DAY; I
DIDN'T NEED THE
MONEY OR THE
NONSENSE.**

THE NEXT MORNING I HAD MY ONE SCHEDULED CLASS. IT WENT GREAT. THEN I CHECKED MY E-MAIL AND A CO-WORKER HAD SENT US ALL THIS:

Hey guys,

For those of you that don't know, I was planning to leave the project next Friday the 23rd to go onto something else. Well, upon seeing the schedule for next week, I've decided to bail today. The Bronx is not in my immediate travel plans (as if getting up at 4 a.m. every day is!), and Stevie disagrees that he ever told me that I would stay relatively close to the lab due to my already long commute. He did, twice. Whether he did or didn't, the pitiful rate I'm making does not support a 3 hour trip one-way. So I figured I may as well leave today instead of next week.

HE BEAT ME TO IT!

SO THAT AFTERNOON I WAS BACK IN THE MAIN LAB. STEVE CAME UP TO ME AND SAID:

MIKE, ABOUT NEXT WEEK'S SCHEDULE...

YEAH, TODAY'S MY LAST DAY.

OH, OKAY.

My consulting firm called me.

I JUST SPOKE TO THAT PISSANT STEVE. THANKS SO MUCH FOR PUTTING UP WITH HIM; I DON'T KNOW IF I WOULD'VE LASTED AS LONG AS YOU. NO ONE NEEDS TO BE TREATED LIKE YOU WERE, MIKE. SCREW THIS PROJECT; THERE'S ONLY THREE BILLABLE SLOTS AND IT'S NOT WORTH THE MONEY. SO IF QUITTING COSTS US THE GIG, IT WOULD BE A BLESSING AT THIS POINT.

I TOOK MOST OF MY NECKTIES AND TURNED THEM INTO ARMBANDS, TO REMIND MYSELF THAT THINGS SHOULD NEVER REACH THAT POINT AGAIN. THEN MY FRIEND FLORA, THE ONE I MARRIED IN 2ND GRADE, GOT MARRIED FOR REAL. I WAS DREADING SEEING MY DAD SINCE I HADN'T TALKED TO HIM IN A FEW YEARS. I'D BEEN THINKING ABOUT WHETHER I MADE THE RIGHT DECISION, AND THE MORE I THOUGHT THE MORE BAD STUFF I REMEMBERED. IT WAS LIKE A LIFETIME MADE-FOR-TV MOVIE. I WAS TALKING TO SOMEONE AND HE WALKED OVER-- INTERRUPTING US-- PUT HIS ARM AROUND MY WAIST, AND PULLED ME ASIDE.

LET ME GET A LOOK AT YOU.

WHAT DO YOU SAY TO THE SON WHO BLEW YOU OFF?

"I DON'T KNOW WHY WE'RE NOT SPEAKING BUT I WOULD LIKE THAT TO CHANGE."

"WHAT CAN I DO TO GET YOU TO FORGIVE ME?"

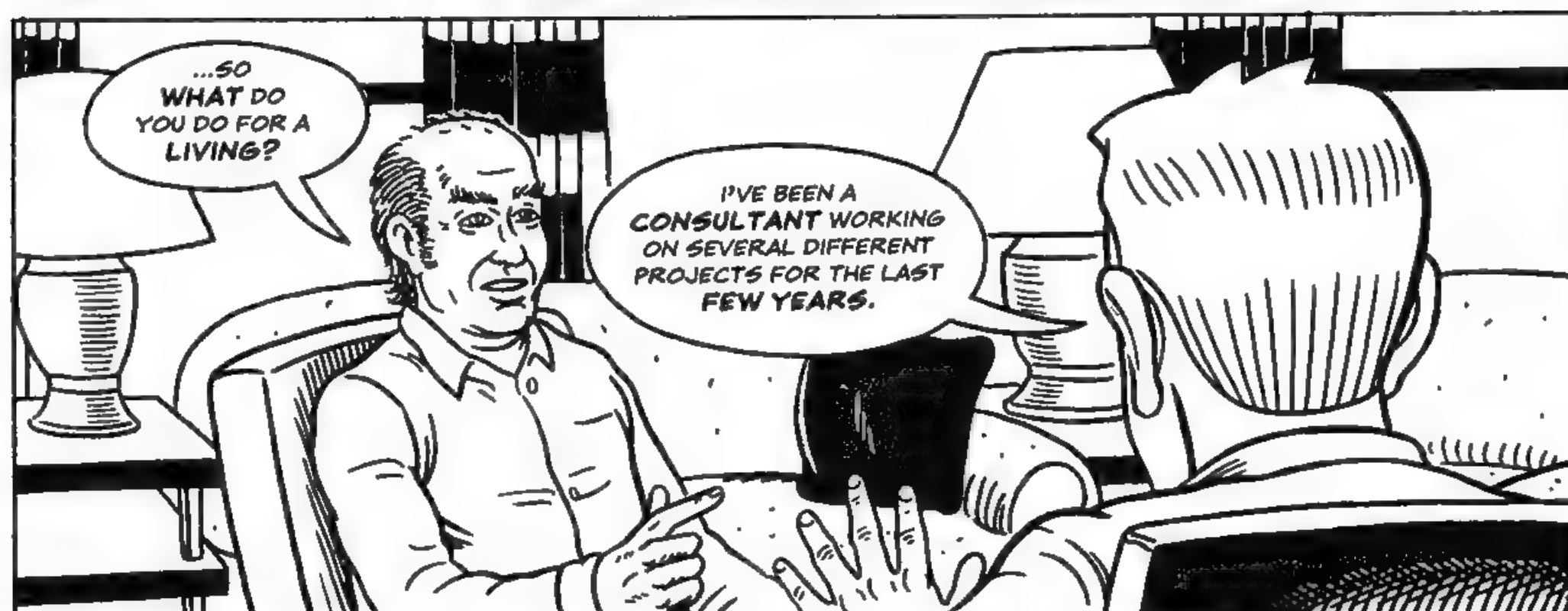
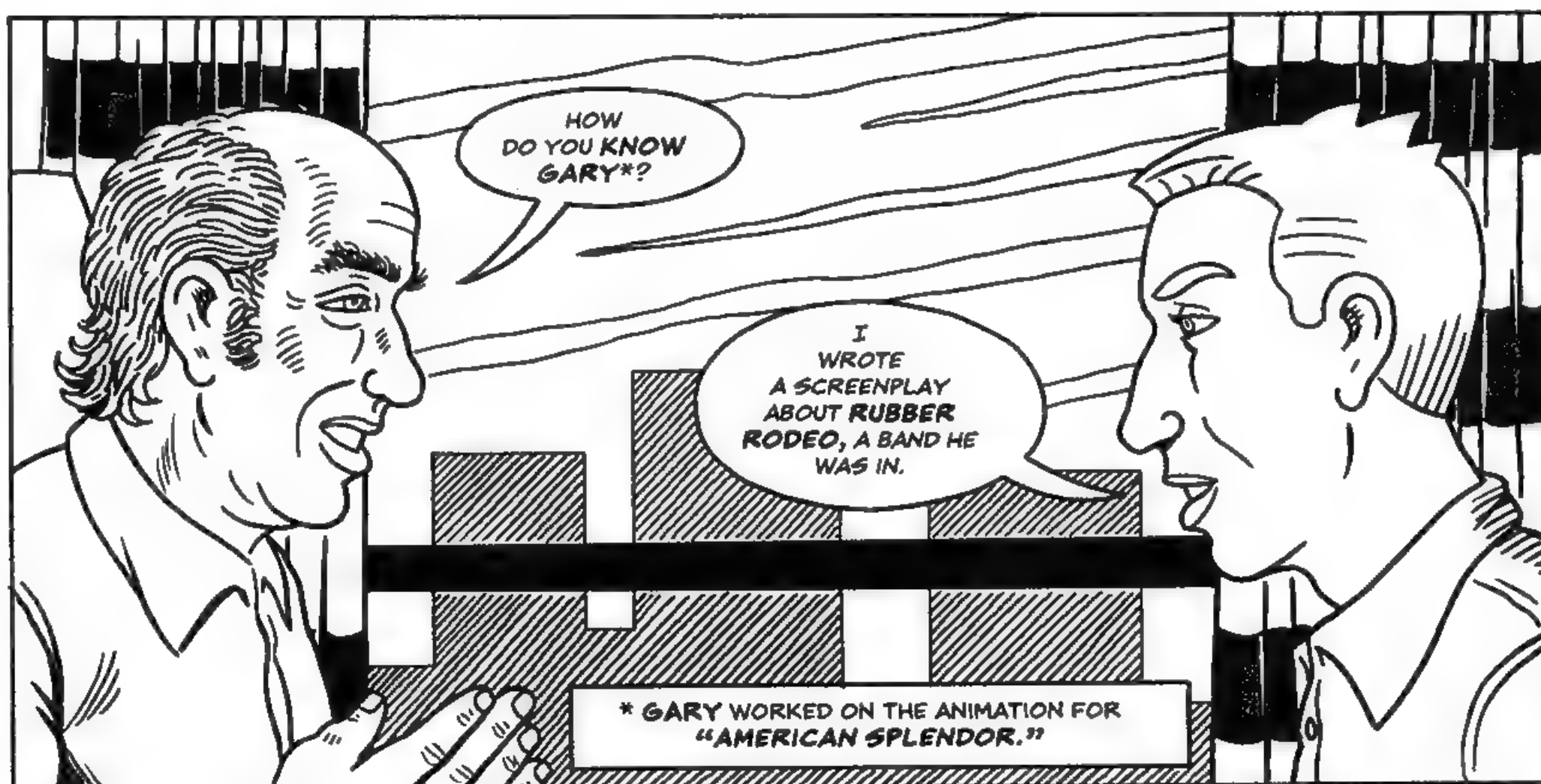


NEW YORK CITY
AUGUST, 2003

NOK!
NOK!

...I
DON'T THINK THERE'S
ANYONE THERE.





Dear Harvey,

I told you this past week has been the best week of my life. I wanted to tell you why, and to write it out for myself so that I could never forget how I'm feeling right now. The band Aberdeen has a lyric I always go back to. The song starts, "Let's go outside/it's sunny in California." And what this speaks of to me is the notion that if there's brightness and beauty and joy, somewhere, that these things are possible, anywhere.

IT'S TRUE, HARVEY. IT'S REALLY TRUE. AND I HOPE THAT OVER THE COURSE OF OUR RELATIONSHIP I'VE MANAGED TO, IF NOT CONVINCE YOU, PERSUADE YOU TO CONSIDER THAT NOTION.



ALTHOUGH I KNOW THAT IT'S A BIT OF AN UPHILL BATTLE WITH MR. DOOM AND GLOOM...

MONTHS AGO I AUDITIONED FOR A SHOW ABOUT DATING. THE SHOW'S CREATORS WERE LOOKING FOR INTERESTING CHARACTERS, PEOPLE WITH A UNIQUE APPROACH TO LIFE. I REALLY HIT IT OFF WITH THEM WHEN I CAME IN. A COUPLE OF MONTHS LATER THEY TOLD ME THAT ...


WE WENT BACK OVER OUR CASTING TAPES AND WE STOPPED AT YOURS, WATCHED THE WHOLE THING AND LAUGHED ALL THE WAY THROUGH.

WE FEEL LIKE YOU'RE TOO "ON TO IT" AND WAY TOO HAPPENING FOR OUR SHOW, BUT I THOUGHT WE'D LET YOU KNOW HOW FUNNY WE FOUND YOUR SHIT.

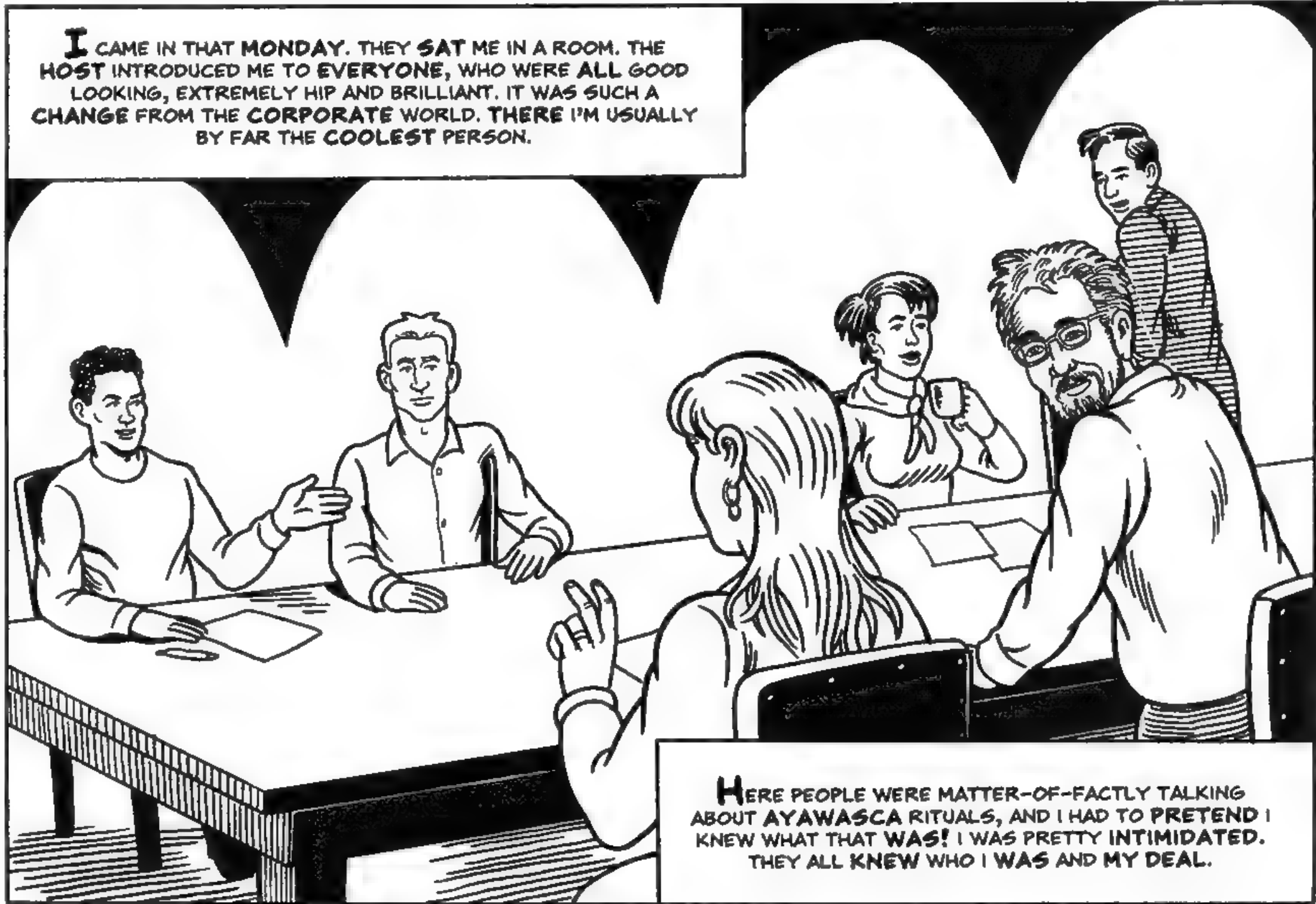


THEN LAST WEEK THE HOST E-MAILED ME. HE HAD SEEN A PIECE ON "OVERHEARD IN NEW YORK" (MICHAEL'S PRIZE WINNING WEBSITE AND BOOK) AND WONDERED IF MAYBE THEY COULD USE ME IN SOME CAPACITY ON THE SERIES. I SUGGESTED BEING A CONVERSATION COACH. AFTER ALL, WHEN IT COMES TO CONVERSATIONS, I WROTE THE BOOK - LITERALLY. HE WAS ALL FOR IT.





SATURDAY WE HAD LUNCH. I TOLD HIM SOME OF THE IDEAS I HAD FOR THE SERIES. HE SAID HE'D BE GLAD TO SET UP WHATEVER MEETINGS I WANTED WITH THE NETWORK. HE TALKED ABOUT PROBLEMS THEY WERE HAVING WITH THEIR CASTING DIRECTOR AND FLOATED THE IDEA OF ME DOING THE POSITION. TO SAY I WAS FLATTERED WAS TO PUT IT MILDLY.



I CAME IN THAT MONDAY. THEY SAT ME IN A ROOM. THE HOST INTRODUCED ME TO EVERYONE, WHO WERE ALL GOOD LOOKING, EXTREMELY HIP AND BRILLIANT. IT WAS SUCH A CHANGE FROM THE CORPORATE WORLD. THERE I'M USUALLY BY FAR THE COOLEST PERSON.

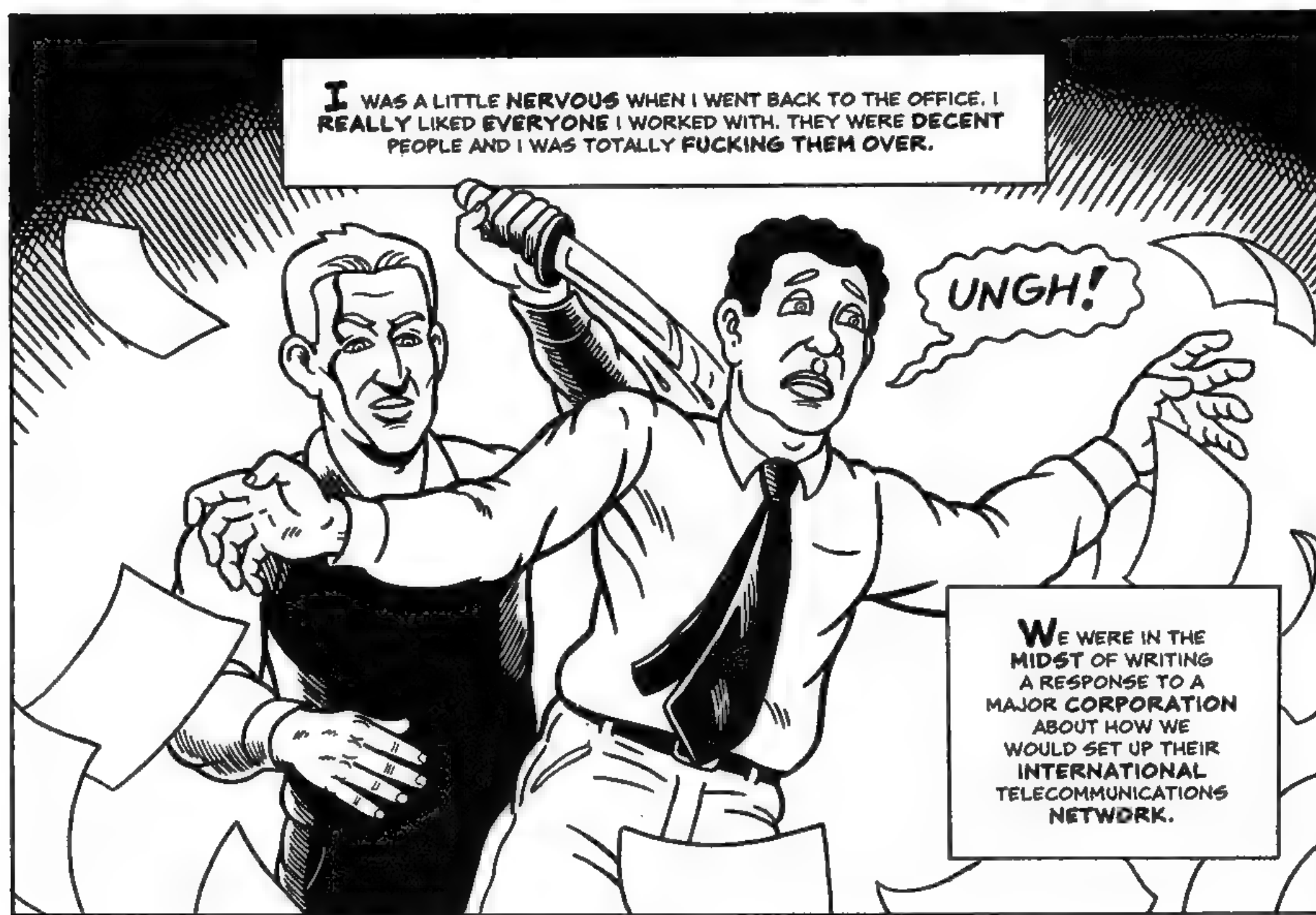
HERE PEOPLE WERE MATTER-OF-FACTLY TALKING ABOUT AYAWASCA RITUALS, AND I HAD TO PRETEND I KNEW WHAT THAT WAS! I WAS PRETTY INTIMIDATED. THEY ALL KNEW WHO I WAS AND MY DEAL.



HOW MUCH NOTICE
WILL YOU HAVE TO GIVE
YOUR CURRENT JOB?

ONE HOUR.
FUCK 'EM.

THEY ASKED ME
SOME QUESTIONS
ABOUT HOW I
WORK AND ABOUT
THE JOB. THEN
THEY OFFERED IT
TO ME. "YOU MEAN
I'M GOING TO GET
PAID TO JUDGE
PEOPLE? I'VE BEEN
GIVING IT AWAY
FOR YEARS."



I WAS A LITTLE NERVOUS WHEN I WENT BACK TO THE OFFICE. I
REALLY LIKED EVERYONE I WORKED WITH. THEY WERE DECENT
PEOPLE AND I WAS TOTALLY FUCKING THEM OVER.

UNGH!

WE WERE IN THE
MIDST OF WRITING
A RESPONSE TO A
MAJOR CORPORATION
ABOUT HOW WE
WOULD SET UP THEIR
INTERNATIONAL
TELECOMMUNICATIONS
NETWORK.

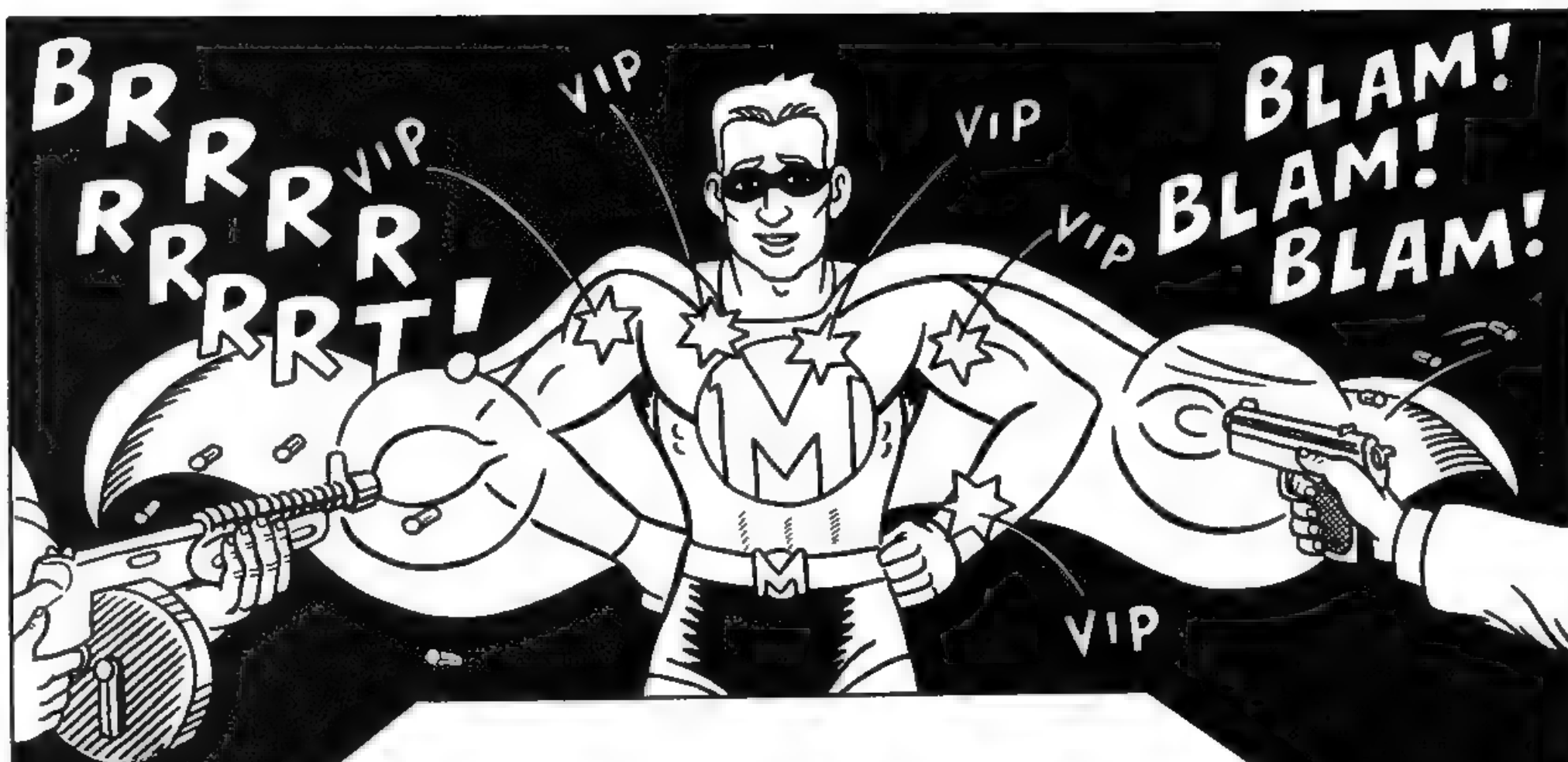
I WAS MY JOB TO EDIT IT ALL AND MAKE IT A SMOOTH 500 PAGE DOCUMENT. THE DEADLINE WAS THREE WEEKS AWAY. YET BECAUSE THEY WERE DECENT PEOPLE THEY ALL UNDERSTOOD. EVERY ONE OF THEM. THEY WERE SINCERELY GLAD FOR ME, EVEN AS THEY REALIZED HOW ABSOLUTELY **SCREWED** THEY WERE.



I WAS RIGHT IN KINDERGARTEN. I WAS RIGHT IN SECOND GRADE. I WAS RIGHT IN HIGH SCHOOL, IN COLLEGE, AT WORK.







I CALLED UP MY GRANDPARENTS WHO I HADN'T SPOKEN TO FOR OVER THREE YEARS. I CALLED MY MOTHER, WHO I HAD RECENTLY TOLD TO STOP CALLING LEST I CONTACT THE POLICE. I SAT WITH THEM ALL AND IT WAS NORMAL AND FUN AND GOOD. I'M EVEN READY - MAYBE - TO SPEAK TO MY FATHER. SUPERMAN DOESN'T GET UPSET AT THE PEOPLE WHO SHOOT BULLETS AT HIM. I GET WHY, NOW.



I HOPE THIS DOESN'T SOUND LIKE I VIEW MYSELF AS SOME SORT OF PERSECUTED VICTIM, BECAUSE I WASN'T. SOMEONE SIGNED MY HIGH SCHOOL YEARBOOK, ADMONISHING ME TO "NEVER LOSE YOUR FIRE."

I'VE ALWAYS BEEN A VIPER, UNFAIRLY MALIGNED BUT HARMFUL ONLY IF PROVOKED. BUT IF PROVOKED...



ON FRIDAY I CAME HOME TO A NEW SINGLE FROM THAT BAND **ABERDEEN**; IT WAS LIKE THE ICING. I PUT THE SONGS ON MY MP3 PLAYER AND HEADED INTO THE CITY TO SEE THE BAND **MY FAVORITE**.





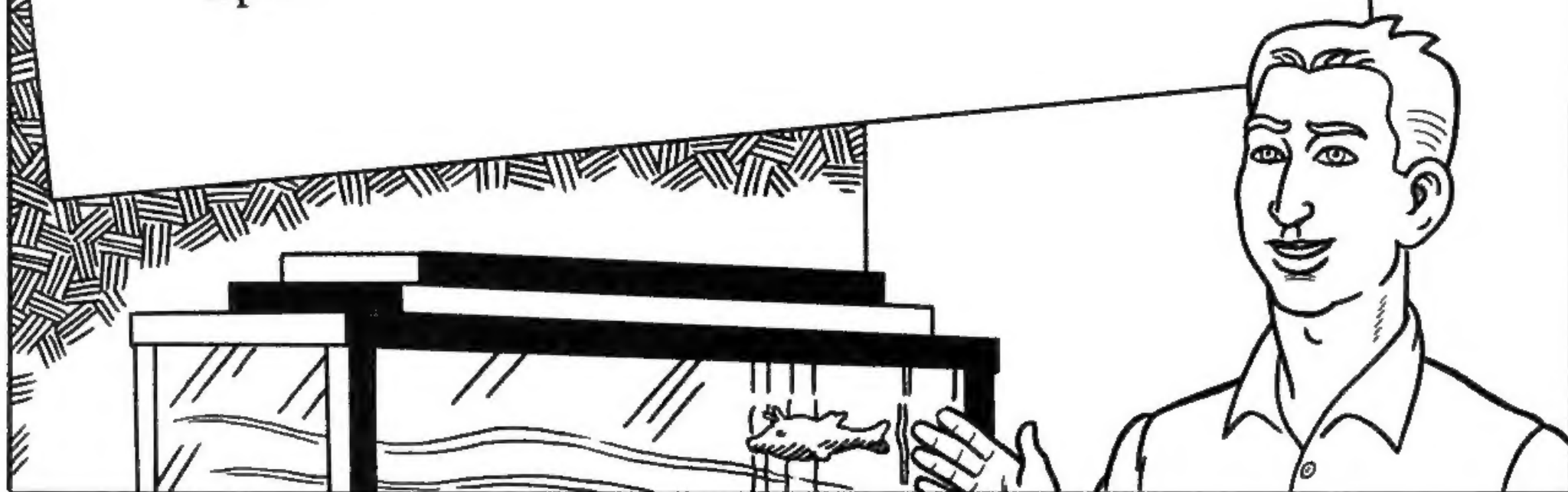
I OFFERED TO BUY.
THE GIRL SINGER
A DRINK. SHE GOT
ME ONE INSTEAD,
FLASHING A PAIR
OF DRINK TICKETS
AND A ROCK STAR
SMILE.



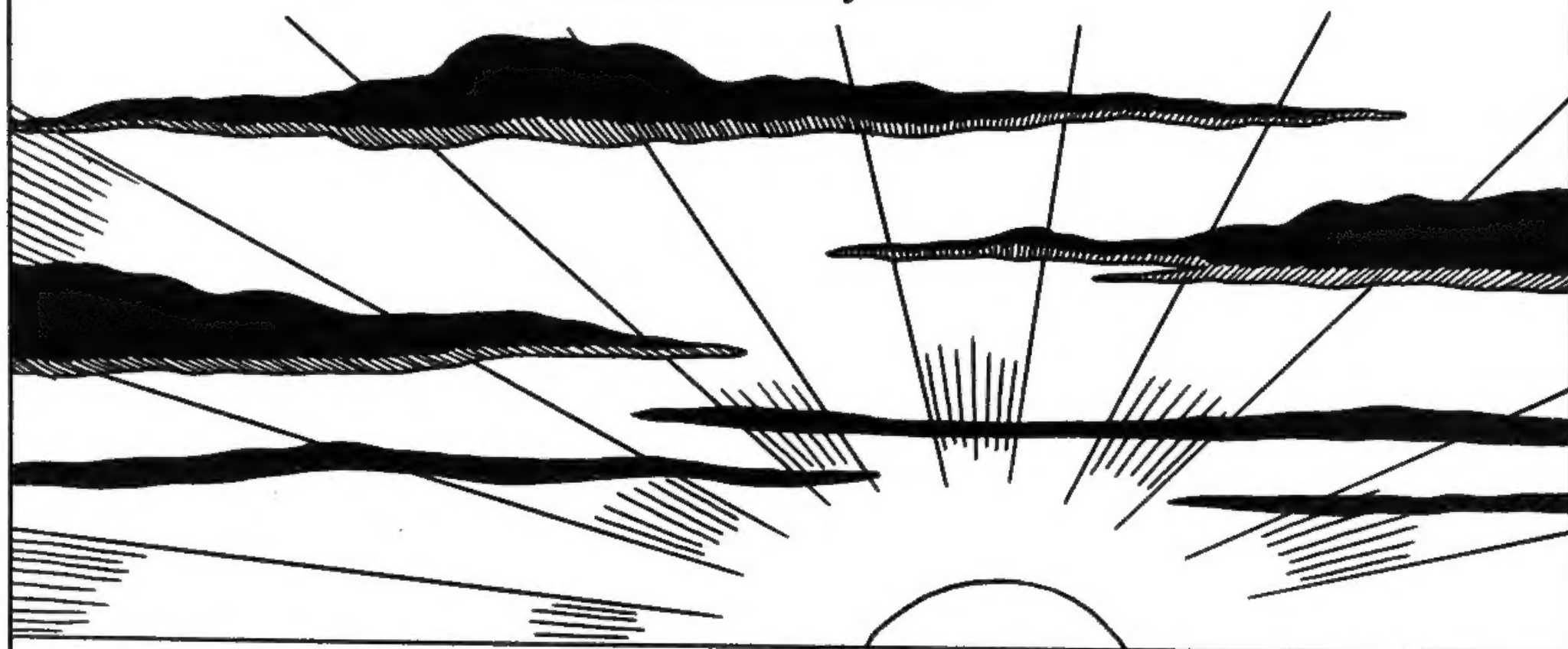
I HAD BEEN WAITING A YEAR AND A HALF TO
HEAR HER SING, "SOME KIDS HAVE PLANS
TO RULE THE WORLD/SOME KIDS HAVE
PLANS TO RUN AWAY."

THE SONG ISN'T AS GOOD LIVE, BUT NO
ONE NEEDS PERFECTION. MY LIFE ISN'T
PERFECT; IF I COULD CHANGE ONE THING
RIGHT NOW IT WOULD BE SOMEHOW BEING
ABLE TO PULL OFF WEARING GINGHAM.

Things might all dissolve tomorrow, I don't know. But it's sunny in California. This letter might sound saccharine, but after living the life I have I'm entitled to sunshine and lollipops. We all are. You quipped that it would be all right if I had a happy ending in "American Splendor." Well, I've got one.



In your worst and darkest moments remember that you have seen another kind of world.



Remember that you can reach it whenever you choose to see. Remember that it will be waiting and that it's real, it's possible - it's yours.

- Ayn Rand

The things we call "characteristics" seem apparent in Michael Malice. He's unapologetically ruthless and intransigent, for example. On the other hand, he has a desire to be creative and a respect for scholarship and art, and he wants to go about achieving results in his own way. The unusual path he's chosen to reach these ends may cause some readers confusion; they may not be able to categorize him, to add up the sum of his parts. Maybe he'd achieve more if he'd just leave well enough alone. Like Michael, we are all faced with choices. To familiarize oneself with his history and compare it to one's own can lead to incidents of self-discovery.

Harvey Pfeffer